1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
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Silwa

# *Preface*

## THE VILLAGE SETTING

SILWA, the village community chosen for this study, is an Egyptian village in the province of Aswan, the southern border province in Upper Egypt.[1] It lies at a distance of about 850 kilometres from Cairo and approximately 80 kilometres to the north of the town of Aswan itself. With a population of nearly 3,500, Silwa is an administrative headquarters with a Police Centre responsible for ten villages, five of which, including Silwa itself, are officially referred to as Northern Silwa (Silwa Bahari), while the other five are called Southern Silwa (Silwa Kibli).

The total area of this administrative unit covers more than 17 square kilometres along the eastern bank of the Nile, with a total population of more than 11,000. The density of population in these villages is about 700 persons per square kilometre, whereas it is slightly less than 600 for the whole country.[2] The sex distribution in the village of Northern Silwa, according to the official statistics of 1947, shows almost even number of males and females, a distribution which is similar to that in the whole country. The table overleaf shows the relation between age distribution in Silwa Bahari and that of the whole country.

Significant in the table is the fact that the figures in Silwa follow pretty closely the national figures, and that slightly less than 40 per cent of the total population both in Silwa and in the country as a whole are less than 14 years old, a population trend characteristic of peasant societies.[3] It cannot be ascertained how the malaria epidemic which spread in Silwa and in all parts of the province of Aswan between 1942 and 1945 has affected the percentages of age distribution in Silwa and might partly account for the slight discrepancies shown in the table.

[1] At present Egypt is divided into sixteen administrative provinces.

[2] *Census of Population of the Kingdom of Egypt for 1947*, Vol. I, pamphlet 1—The Province of Aswan, Govt. Press, 1951 (Arabic). The General Census for the whole country from 1947 had not been published during the writer's stay in Egypt (1951) and he had to work out figures for the whole country from the previous General Census of 1937, taking into account the increase of population from 17,000,000 in 1937 to 19,000,000 in 1947.

[3] Oscar Lewis, *Life in a Mexican Village: Tepoztlan Restudied*, University of Illinois Press, 1951, p. 30.

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sickness is a pious deed. It is often told to a sick person that holy people have suffered from one ailment or another and have endured it willingly for God.

All this shows how the villagers' traditional notions about health and sickness are mixed with magical and religious beliefs; God is the afflicter as well as the healer; it is He who has fixed the life span of every person, and this cannot be lengthened or precipitated by a second, much less a minute, unless He wills it. Together with this, there is the belief that hope and propitiation cannot fail to produce some expected results in certain crises of life.

The village has experienced some measure of direct contact with modern medicine as a result of the establishment of a health unit by the Ministry of Health in 1936. This health unit is a wonderful building, situated on the southern border of the village, and is composed of a maternity section, an isolation ward, and a general section. It cost the Government about £E3,000, yet it has never functioned properly or systematically as doctors who came to it could hardly endure life in the village for more than six months, whereupon they tried every possible means to be transferred to towns. The villagers appreciated the health unit at the beginning, but their resentment to it was ironically aroused during the malaria and typhoid epidemic of 1943 on the grounds that sick people were taken away to the isolation ward, and dying away from one's relatives and home is the worst thing that can happen to any person. Their hostility towards it is expressed with reference to its unfortunate location, it being near the cemetery; thus going to the health unit has become psychologically a bad omen. However, the establishment of the health unit has given folk-medicine the greatest challenge, and at present the villagers are becoming increasingly interested in medicine as such, alongside their usual traditional cures. In serious cases the doctor's help is usually sought besides the traditional cures, and it is becoming a sign of social prestige to bring him into the home of the sick; but remaining in hospital for treatment or isolation for contagious diseases is still resisted.

Although one finds that the villagers have adopted certain items of material culture from the town, such as the use of manufactured goods, new types of vegetables, and some medicines, such adoption is a surface substitution. Their ideas about land ownership, the importance of children, family and clan solidarity, categories of respect relationships, sex dichotomy, supernatural sanctions, and the importance of ritual and ceremony in both social and religious life, remain almost unaltered.

There is, however, one feature in the village's social life that has undergone a certain amount of change as a result of changes in the economic conditions, and that is the role and function of leadership. Till very recently leadership has been mainly connected with families owning large plots of land; and such families assumed the responsibility and obligation for receiving guests from outside the village, providing hospitality for

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## THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS AND EVENTS OF CHILDHOOD

There is another aspect of the high mortality rate of children, which is not confined to the Silwa community, but applies to the rest of the country. Infant mortality has an obvious effect on the stability of marriage relationship, as a woman that bears children who do not survive is in danger of being divorced by her husband, for she is considered the same as one who cannot bear children at all. The larger the number of children surviving, the less likelihood there is of divorce.[1] Hence, the dire need to prevent such a disaster by women who resort to many devices for pregnancy or warding off the evil eye, some of which were described earlier. Official statistics clearly show the relation between divorce and the number of children born or surviving; the latter case is shown in the following table.

TABLE III

The relation between divorce and the number of surviving children in percentages[2]

| *No. of Children* | *Divorces* | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1942 | 1943 | 1944 | 1945 | 1946 |
| None | 74·7 | 76·0 | 77·0 | 76·8 | 77·8 |
| One child | 16·3 | 15·78 | 15·3 | 15·3 | 15·0 |
| Two children | 5·08 | 4·78 | 4·52 | 4·54 | 4·2 |
| Three „ | 2·18 | 2·10 | 1·95 | 1·90 | 1·77 |
| Four „ | 0·985 | 0·907 | 0·754 | 0·712 | 0·778 |
| Five „ | 0·398 | 0·395 | 0·316 | 0·348 | 0·332 |
| More than five children | 0·318 | 0·222 | 0·245 | 0·186 | 0·205 |

This high mortality rate for this age group is partly due to the onset of various child diseases such as measles, whooping cough, chicken pox, diphtheria, as well as endemic diseases such as dysentery. As mentioned earlier, the sickness of children at this stage is acknowledged by the villagers themselves and sometimes attributed to acute states of jealousy from siblings, or to the exposure of the delicate child to the evil eye.[3]

On the whole, the family treatment of the infant is relatively more protective and more attentive compared with the later period of childhood. Nursing children usually fare better than their older siblings in health and appearance. The protective attitude towards nurslings and toddlers could

[1] M. Hussanain, 'Infant Mortality in Egypt', Ph.D. Thesis (unpublished), London, 1940, p. 218.

[2] Worked out from the *Pocket Census of 1946*, p. 31.

[3] According to *Vital Statistics* in Egypt, diseases responsible for infant mortality according to their death roll are infectious diseases, respiratory system diseases, diarrhoea and congenital diseases.

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where. In default of compliance or in the case of the continued absence of the child, its parents or guardian are to be notified, and are liable to fine or imprisonment.

These were the main laws governing the compulsory school in Egypt until 1948, and the village school was on a half-day basis up to that year, boys attending school in the morning, followed by the girls in the afternoon.[1] There are usually four classes in the school building and three other rooms, one for the staff and two for stores. The number of school-children during the year 1950–51 was 138 in the four classes. According to the official records the numbers of children of the compulsory school age for the last seven years were:

TABLE VI

Children of the compulsory school age in Silwa (1944–51)

| *Year* | *Total* | *Boys* | *Girls* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1944 | 154 | 77 | 87 |
| 1945 | 98 | 50 | 48 |
| 1946 | 98 | 45 | 53 |
| 1947 | 97 | 48 | 49 |
| 1948 | 131 | 60 | 71 |
| 1949 | 47 | 26 | 21 |
| 1950 | 61 | 38 | 23 |
| 1951 | 77 | 51 | 26[2] |

The school, however, has only places for 150 children of all ages, and thus there is scope for some parents to compete for appeal either to the Omda or the headmaster at the beginning of the year to exempt their children from schooling or to withdraw them on grounds of lack of space.

As to the staff, the school has between three and four teachers; two of them at present are from the village itself, and the teachers are either the products of al-Azhar, the theological University, or the Elementary Training College (four to five years' course). The main requirement for entrance to the latter at the age of fourteen is the memorization of half

[1] It is indicative of the male-female ethos that boys should attend school first, and even at present when the school is full, and the classes are mixed, the boys sit in the front, with the girls at the back of the class. This reflects the different sex norm guiding the behaviour of the villagers in comparison with mixed education in the modern Egyptian Universities where, for instance, girl students sit in the front and the male students sit behind them, yet there is no real mixing in the lecture rooms. The front rows are normally reserved for girls, and the general tendency is for the girls to keep to these rows.

[2] The number of children eligible for compulsory school in 1949, 1950 and 1951 is comparatively low because of the very high death rate amongst both children and adults between 1941 and 1943 as a result of the malaria epidemic.

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150 593 I fancy that there was really no just cause for the woman's jealous suspicions. However, she has reduced her husband to a state of abject fear lest he may arouse her anger—though I did hear that on one occasion he had plucked up sufficient courage to exercise his 'rights' as a husband, and so had administered a whipping for some fault she had committed!

460 241 With regard to the division of labour among the sexes, the men certainly have the hardest and largest share, the most strenuous work in the fields being invariably done by them. The women and girls join their menfolk in the cultivation after the sun has risen, but their work is usually confined to the gathering of dry roots, tending the cattle, fetching the water for the household (Fig. 16), and so on. Of course, living is simple among the peasants, so that very strenuous work for the women is not necessary. Much, however, that might be done by them is neglected simply because they are without training in domestic duties and do not realize what important work lies to their hands.

460 515 It is, of course, very difficult for the peasants to be as clean as they should be. All the water has to be fetched by the women, often from some distance. No water is laid on in the villages, no bathrooms exist, and the houses lack the most ordinary domestic offices. Excuses must, therefore, be made for the Egyptian women, who have had none of the advantages of the poorest [1019] woman in England. The instinct of the Egyptian *fellāḥīn*, however, is to be clean, and the religion of Islām commands ablutions. A man will almost instinctively strip and bathe if he happens to [834] be near a canal or the river, but this privilege is denied to the women, as modesty forbids their bathing in public.

854 562 One of the most crying needs in Egypt is that both girls and women should have instruction in the care and upbringing of children. The children undergo a great deal of unnecessary suffering during the early years of their infancy; not because their mothers are lacking in affection, for Egyptian women are, as a rule, devoted mothers, but because they are so hopelessly ignorant.

[164] The results of such ignorance more often than not leave an indelible mark on the child, such as defective eyesight or even absolute blindness. To prevent or cure disease in their children the women 854 will go to one magician after another and purchase from them 789 amulets and written charms, not grudging for a moment the ex- 755 penditure of what may be to them considerable sums of money.



[Text continues on page 42]

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Numbers of these prophylactics may be seen hanging from the necks of the hapless infants.

The various primitive medicinal remedies, well known to, and used by, all village matrons, are of such a nature that one wonders how any child manages to survive at all. Most of the women have a deeply rooted objection to going to a doctor for advice, supposing one to be available in the neighbourhood ; and I have found it hard work to overcome this prejudice, even in the case of people who know me well and who have every confidence in me. It is encouraging to hear that the Egyptian Government has recently allocated a certain sum of money for the purpose of starting baby-welfare centres. If only these institutions can be got into good working order, and can be utilized for the purpose of training young girls in the proper care and management of children, it will be a big step in the right direction, will ensure a much stronger and healthier peasantry, and will put an end to a vast amount of unnecessary suffering. During the years I have lived among these people I have had hundreds of sick children of all ages brought to me, and it has been heartbreaking to realize, as having had no medical training I inevitably must, that I am quite incapable of dealing with the terrible diseases from which they are often suffering. As will be seen in some of the subsequent chapters, a great deal of this sickness is due to superstition—taboos against washing, for instance, being very strict.

Much good has, of course, been done by the dispensaries, which in the past were run by Englishwomen ; but they are naturally limited in number, and the mothers will often defer taking their children there for advice and medicine till it is almost too late, or, at any rate, till the child has become very ill indeed. I myself had the privilege of seeing something of what was accomplished by an English lady at one of these dispensaries during the first three or four years that I resided in Egypt. I can bear witness to the splendid work she did, and I know how much she was loved and respected by the hundreds of poor women who brought their children to her for treatment. I am sure, from what I have heard of similar institutions in other parts of the country, that the same good work has been done by many others in the different provinces. The number of these dispensaries is not great enough to meet the crying need, and those that do exist have to be supported by funds from the Government, for they receive practically no support, so

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far as I know, from private individuals. It is very different in England, where the hospitals for children and adults alike are supported by voluntary contributions. It is not that charity is lacking in Egypt—far from it; but for *organised* charity such as we have in England there is a crying need.

It is not altogether surprising, considering the state of ignorance in which they exist, that the mental outlook of most of the villagers is low. As far as the women are concerned, there is nothing to raise it. Sexual matters form the chief topic of their conversation, and this has a most degrading effect both on them and on their children, before whom they discuss the most private matters without the slightest reserve. Thus the children from their very early years hear subjects spoken of and joked about in a manner that is most revolting to educated people. What chance have the children in such circumstances of growing up into pure-minded men and women? I am told (for such conversation rarely takes place in my presence) that the women are far greater offenders in this respect than the men, who usually refrain from discussing their wives with outsiders. Whether this is true or not I am not in a position to say, but at any rate the children, and especially the girls, who are more constantly with their mothers than the boys, hear the most private sexual matters openly discussed, and in such a way as to poison their minds at the very outset of their lives. Marriage is, of course, the one and only aim in life among the girls, and the desire to get a husband is encouraged in every way by the mothers. It is quite a pitiful sight to see a little girl decked out in all the jewellery she can muster, dressed in a gaily coloured frock decorated with beads and jangles (Fig. 17), and with a veil drawn coquettishly across her face, standing about the village street, or outside the house, obviously on the look-out to attract some man. In all this they are aided and abetted by their mothers, who regard it as a compliment to themselves as well as to their daughters if the latter are sought after as wives at an early age. The Egyptian Government is endeavouring to prohibit the very early marriages which have been usual in the past, and there is now a law forbidding a girl to marry till she is sixteen and a boy till he is eighteen. However, in small, out-of-the-way villages the law has been disobeyed to my certain knowledge in more than one case. False ages were, I suppose, given to the *ḳāḍi*, as the man who draws up the marriage contracts is called; and he, in view of the fee he

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present at the weekly market, seating himself, with all his paraphernalia, on the outskirts of the market-place and under the shadow of a tree. A number of patterns were placed before the young man; he at once selected that called *esh-shagareh*, and the tattooer set to work. While working he had no occasion to refer to his pattern; long and constant practice had made him an adept. He would lightly prick out a small portion of the design, then work over it two or three times more, and so proceed until the task was completed. The first finger was not touched, and, when I remarked on this, my servant told me that that finger was never tattooed on a man's hand, but that it was done on a woman's. It took some time before the work was finished, the pain, which was great, being heroically borne by the unfortunate young man. However, I suppose that the thought of how beautiful he would look afterward helped him to endure! I rather fancy that the tattooing of the hand is a sign of manhood; it is certainly a painful initiatory rite. Soon after I returned to my house I found that the young man's hand, and indeed the whole of the right arm, had begun to swell, and that he was decidedly feverish. I made him lie down, and as the morning went on the fever and inflammation increased, and he was unfit to move. I wanted to send for a doctor, but he assured me he would soon be all right, and that most people got like this after having their hand tattooed. Toward the late afternoon he was much better, and by the next morning he had practically recovered.

Among the negroid peoples in Egypt, especially among the Berberines, cicatrization lines are often seen along the cheeks. These are probably tribal marks. Occasionally similar marks are to be seen near the ear or on the side of the forehead, and these have usually been made as a cure for bad eyes, headache, or other ills. Some Egyptians have the marks of two or three short cuts on the side of the face close to the ear. When I inquired as to the meaning of these cuts I was told that they were made because it was the custom. This practice is, I think, tending to die out.

It is quite a common sight to see notches cut along the outer edge of the ear—sometimes in one ear only, sometimes in both. The number of notches also varies, and in some cases only one has been cut. I have never noticed these notches in women's ears. I have observed that this kind of intentional deformation of the ear is common among many of the Arab tribes settled in Egypt,

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ledge this woman is of an exceedingly jealous disposition, which no doubt accounts for that particular trait being exhibited in her *ukht*! Her husband is a decent man, but I have had no opportunity of judging as to whether he is jealous or not. However, one must presume that he is so, in view of the fact that his *ukht* appears to possess this quality in so marked a degree!

As will be seen below on p. 186, some of the subterranean beings also have each an *ukht*.

FIG. 34. CHILD WEARING FROCK AND HOOD OF SACKING

A woman remains unclean for forty days after giving birth to a boy and for thirty days if the child is a girl. I have also been informed that the husband must not enter the room occupied by his wife for seven days after the birth, and that if he wishes to speak to her he must do so from a distance. I am not sure if this is always the rule, but it is so among some of the *fellāḥīn*.

A child is not washed at all until the seventh day after birth, and then the face, hands, and feet only are washed. When I endeavoured to make the women understand how unhealthy this was they declared that they were afraid to wash a child until it was seven days old, and then only to the limited extent just mentioned, for fear of its catching cold. On one occasion a child was brought to me in a most filthy state, and covered from head to foot with suppurating sores. I told the mother that I would not give her any medicine until she had washed the child. On hearing this she became terribly distressed, and declared that she could not wash it. I remained firm, however, in my refusal to give her anything until she had made the child cleaner. It transpired that the child's father had had spots on his body when he was younger,

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and from what the woman said I fear that it was syphilis from which he was suffering. Anyhow, she told me that if the father or mother suffered in this way their children were never washed at all until they were old enough to wash themselves. Two doctor friends of mine confirmed this, stating that they knew the practice to be a common one among the peasants. As for the child which was brought to me, I am glad to say that I at last persuaded the mother to wash it to a certain extent, and I gave her some medicine. This happened a few years ago, and on my visiting the same village again some time later I was glad to hear that the child was well and flourishing.

FIG. 35. FROCK AND HOOD MADE OF SACKING

The same woman had lost several children in early infancy before this particular infant was born. The child was wearing a peculiar dress, made of sacking, and with a hood in one piece with the frock (Fig. 34). The woman informed me, and I have been told the same thing by others, that this dress was put on the child to make it live. The dress must always be made out of a sack which has contained raw cotton; no other kind will do. Two such dresses were made and given to me (see Fig. 35).

On the seventh day after the birth a midwife comes and washes the child, as stated above, and also the mother. The water used

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842 789 [841] If a woman when she gives birth to a child does not want to conceive again for some time she takes some date stones and covers them with some of the blood of her confinement, and then, tying them up in a rag, conceals them in a wall of her house between the bricks. The chink is then stopped up with clay. Each date stone she thus conceals represents a year, and the number, of course, varies according to the number of years she wishes to remain without offspring. When she wishes to have a child again she removes the date stones from their hiding-place, steps over them seven times, and then, placing them in water, bathes in it. I had the opportunity of witnessing such a performance once. The woman, to enable me to take a photograph in a better light, placed the date stones on the threshold of her house, and then stepped over them. Some of these date stones, with the rag in which they had been tied up, were afterward given to me.

847 754 789 [791] A man who is well known to me divorced one of his two wives a year or so ago, and this woman resolved to have her revenge on the other wife. She accomplished her purpose in the following manner. She consulted a female magician, who wrote a spell on an egg and another on a palm-leaf. A male member of the divorced woman's family (probably her brother) took the egg and the leaf and hid them in a tomb. The hiding-place is kept secret, so that no one can remove them, for if they were discovered and taken away they would no longer remain effective. It has come to the knowledge of the man's wife that the divorced woman has acted in this way, and the spells, so she says, have made it impossible for her to bear a child. Possibly the firm belief she has in the potency [758] of such spells has brought her into a neuropathic condition.

842 164 163 515 The fact that so many methods of curing barrenness are employed by the peasants is an indication that, despite the high birth-rate, infertility in women is not uncommon in Egypt. As has been pointed out to me by a doctor who is in daily touch with the poor, venereal disease, which is, unfortunately, very prevalent in some villages, is largely responsible for this state of affairs. A proper organization, involving treatment and instruction in simple hygiene—at present, so far as I know, entirely lacking in the country places—is badly needed to prevent the further spread of this terrible scourge.

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The native bread has a good deal of *dura* mixed with the wheaten flour, but it is quite good to eat when fresh, and if you can choose your bakeress! It is certainly far more satisfying than the white bread eaten in England, and the fact that the most nourishing properties are not extracted from the flour may account for the beautiful teeth which are so noticeable among most Egyptians of all classes.

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## CHAPTER XII

### THE VILLAGE MEDICINE-MAN AND MEDICINE-WOMAN

THE village magician, whether male or female, often combines the practice of medicine with that of magic; indeed, it is difficult in many cases to distinguish the one from the other, so closely are they allied. Many of the cures are magic pure and simple, and when some herbal mixture is prescribed it is, more often than not, administered by the village 'doctor' to the accompaniment of the recitation of some magic spell. Without this addition many of the peasants would consider the medicine valueless so great is their belief in the efficacy of magic!

In a village where I have often resided for two or three months at a time there lives a woman who is renowned for her goodness. All her fellow-villagers have the greatest faith in her, and sick people beg her to come to them and cure them. She sits down or stands by the sufferer, and, holding a short length of dry maize-stalk, passes it round and round his or her head, repeating prayers and passages from the Ḳorān (Fig. 121). The stalk must then be either burned in a fire or thrown into running water. It is believed that the complaint passes into the stalk and is destroyed in the fire or carried away by the water. Twice over, when I was unwell, this woman was asked by one of my village friends to pay me a visit. On both occasions she acceded to the request, and, after she had finished her performance, the stalks were burned, and my friend declared that she soon noticed a decided improvement in my condition.

It can be readily understood that in these Egyptian villages, where dust and flies abound, and where the villagers themselves are so ignorant of hygiene, eye-troubles are very common. It is appalling to see how defective is the eyesight of many people of the peasant class and the amount of eye-disease, if not actual blindness, that prevails; and all this in spite of really excellent eye-hospitals controlled by the Government. Unfortunately, the seeds of disease are sown in childhood, and even babyhood. Until the women

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are less ignorant, and learn to realize the importance of keeping their babies clean, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for the doctors to combat the many eye-diseases that cause so much suffering to hundreds of the peasants. With conditions as they are, cures for sore and inflamed eyes are much in demand and are numerous. The following are some of the remedies for eye-trouble employed by the village medicine-man or medicine-woman.

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FIG. 121. A MEDICINE-WOMAN PASSING A PIECE OF MAIZE-STALK ROUND A FEMALE PATIENT'S HEAD TO CURE HER OF ILLNESS

The medicine-woman whose methods of healing I described above has a great reputation as an eye-doctor. Those who suffer from inflamed eyes and swollen eyelids often resort to her for treatment. She takes a lump of sugar, and, turning back the inflamed eyelid, rubs it inside with the sugar. "Black blood" comes away after this operation, so I was told. She then takes a large onion, extracts the juice, and mixes with it some salt. This concoction she drops into the eyes of her patient. "It is very painful," my informant told me, but she added that it did a lot of good. While the woman is rubbing the inside of the eyelid with the lump of sugar her patients often stop up their ears with their fingers, as this is supposed to decrease the pain of the operation. For three days afterward the eye, or eyes, must be kept covered with a handkerchief, so that no air can get in. At the end of the three days the woman gives her patient a second dose of the onion

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members of her own sex, and gives them the same somewhat drastic treatment.

A headache is sometimes cured in the following way. The magician in his capacity as medicine-man writes out a charm, which is hung on the patient's head over the spot where the pain is greatest. The charm must be written in a circle, and is, of course, in Arabic. Fig. 123 is an exact copy, only transliterated.

Sidī Aḥmed el-Bedawī is one of the most celebrated sheikhs in Egypt. His tomb is at Ṭanṭa, where a great festival is held in his honour every year.

The following is a prescription for a disordered spleen. The magician fetches leaves of *el-atl* (tamarisk), pours red vinegar on them, and boils this mixture on the fire, afterward pressing it through a sieve. The patient must drink a coffee-cup of this medicine early in the morning, repeating the dose for seven days, during which time he must eat no solid food, but should drink soup made by boiling a fowl.

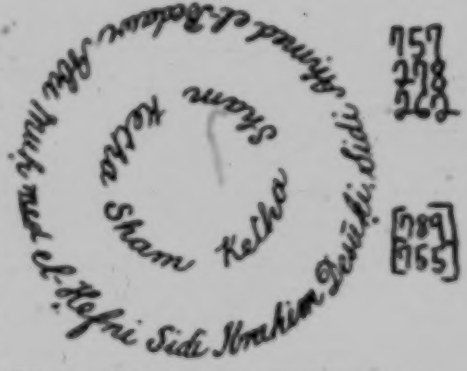


FIG. 123. CHARM TO CURE A HEADACHE

Distention of the stomach is a very common complaint among the peasants, due, of course, to acute indigestion. In some parts of Egypt a boiled crow is prescribed as a cure for this complaint, and the patient, I am told, quickly experiences relief after eating this most repulsive food. Another more reasonable cure is prescribed by a medicine-man of my acquaintance. A small quantity of flour is mixed with a little yeast early in the morning; this must be left to rise in the sun till mid-day, when sufficient water is mixed with it to form a liquid. Soon after taking some of this preparation the patient must drink some soup made by boiling a fowl. The bowels will then act, and relief be soon experienced.

If a woman is suffering from prolonged labour, and birth is difficult, her relatives will call in the aid of a magician. He writes two charms, in the form of two magic squares, on two separate pieces of paper. One square is suspended by a string from the woman's waist, so that the inscribed paper hangs over her left

(3) *Health and Sickness*

291 The fellah's clothes are no more of a barrier against the elements than his work. They cut him off from neither air nor sun, earth nor water. This absorption into his environment gives him abundance of physical life. His robust 142 and hardy constitution is in harmony with nature. For 513 sleep he needs no mattress, no comfort. He bears the most 151 brutal incisions without a cry. Colds, headaches and the foulest odours trouble him not at all. His appetite never fails, and his extremely sensitive hearing catches the slightest sound, human or other.

● 164 Very often, unfortunately, Nature turns treacherously upon him and infects his unsuspecting body with diseases which fatten and undermine him. These are endemic diseases which are rooted in the peasant class. Let us say nothing of tuberculosis or hereditary syphilis, which are the fellah's constant companions. Far more dangerous are bilharzia, ankylostomiasis (hookworm) and malaria, which in some *mudiriyas* affect more than 80% of the population. [515] These arise from lack of cleanliness, and too close a contact between man and the soil.

But the most noticeable are the eye-diseases. Though the greenness of the fields is restful to the sight, the heat and glare of the sun and still more the thick dust which no rain ever lays, the sandy wind from the hardby desert, the dung, the flies, and dirty fingers all combine from childhood to inflame and infect the eyes, if not to blind them. It is impossible to pass through a village without being struck by the number of blind and one-eyed people going about. According to statistics they amount to 60% of the population. In 1927 it was officially recorded that there were 266,550 one-eyed people and 110,000 completely blind. In 1937 the provinces of Minia and Assiut were credited with 50,000 either one-eyed or blind. In actual fact there are more than that. There is no counting the bleary or bloodshot looks, the eyes dimmed by glaucoma or trachoma.

Another scourge is *bilharzia* (**). This is a form of haematuria caused by a parasite which is absorbed into the system through the skin. The fellaheen make their ritual ablutions [515 daily, often side by side, in any sort of water, and work bare- 744] foot on the damp earth or in the mud of the drains. The larva of this parasite, which is peculiar to Egypt, grows

up and is transmitted in water and sodden ground, in the stagnant village ponds, and, since the development of perennial irrigation, in the standing water of runnels and badly levelled canals. 164

Bilharzia is not in itself a serious disease. But, beginning with the passing of blood in the urine, it often develops, through lack of attention, into complications such as the stone, fistula, and ulceration of the penis. The infection may reach the kidneys, the liver and even the eyes. Above all, it lasts for 18 or 20 years. 90% of the male fellaheen are affected by it and become accustomed to passing blood and feeling continually below par.

Bilharzia is transmitted through urine and water; hookworm through earth and excrement. Like bilharzia, hookworm is a collective disease, a permanent epidemic, and is introduced into the system by a parasite which passes through the skin. Ankylostomiasis is less widespread than bilharzia, but more dangerous, since it consumes the red corpuscles of the blood (41).

As the fellaheen never make use of human dung, and have never learnt the use of latrines, they relieve themselves no matter where. If they are already infected with the worm, every such place is a new source of danger to their fellows, who walk barefoot or lie down heedlessly on the ground. The worm can move several feet in the darkness; it settles in damp soil, whence it passes through the skin to the intestines. 514 164 [24]

You may see countless men and women in the prime of life who are stricken with this disease, their faces puffy and lifeless with its ravages. Neither their vigorous constitution, their youth, nor the treatment they receive has been able to save them. 164

Malaria, spread by the ricefields and *birkas*, affects 65% of the fellaheen, and in some villages East of the Delta as many as 90%.

What makes these three diseases so alarming is not so much their inherent seriousness as their constantly widening extent, and the way in which the fellaheen themselves by their work and their manner of life contribute unconsciously to the perpetuation of the evil. It should also be remarked that the Government's measures to combat these diseases have not as yet had very much effect.

743 Special hospitals have been established to fight against
744 the three diseases in every *bandar*, or provincial capital.
164 These, however, can only treat patients from the immediate neighbourhood. It is difficult for others to leave their villages, in which there are no hospital facilities. If they all went to the *markaz*, the Government doctor and his pharmacy would be overwhelmed.

You may tell a sick man that he has no excuse. The towns are full of hospitals; there is free medicine at the dispensaries, and any number of doctors available.

"Yes", he will reply, "but there is no doctor in my village. And if there were, I could not afford to pay him any more than to buy medicine. As for going away to hospital, I cannot leave my wife and children. And how should I live while I am away? Where should I find money to pay for my food and lodging? I prefer to trust in Providence"(*).

A friend of the author's who is an *omda* gives a different view. "In the old days a sick fellah had to ride for three hours on donkey-back to get to hospital, whatever his condition. Now we have built a free dispensary in the village itself. A doctor comes four times a week, and when he is away he can be called by telephone. In this way treatment has become easier."

759 If the fellaheen go to the barber for treatment (till
744 they die of it), this is because he is the only available practi-
743 tioner, just as the money-lender is the only available source of loans. The proof is that, when the mobile medical services arrive in a village, the fellaheen come eagerly for help and submit with unflinching confidence to any sort of treatment.

743 Take for example the travelling hospital at Tahta. The
744 Ministry of Public Health rented a site for six months, and
164 tents were set up by the Department of Epidemic Diseases. Everything was clean. Before the opening day a publicity campaign was carried out in the surrounding villages, and a ceremonial opening was arranged. One doctor and six assistants were at the disposal of the patients, who were treated free. The average attendance was eighty a day, of whom twenty-five had hookworm and only three had bilharzia (this was Upper Egypt). But these splendid efforts on the part of the Ministry of Public Health are no more than a drop in the ocean. Unfortunately, the fellah's

own habits often neutralise the treatment he receives, so that these diseases remain as deep-rooted as ever in the peasant class. If only they would pay attention, until more can be done, to the advice and directions which are given them! The answer is that even if they tried they could not hope to succeed, because the conditions under which they live are at every point unfavourable to the attempt. Here lies the heart of the problem.

(4) *Food and Drink*

Water is the first problem; not this time considered for its use in irrigation, which has been studied over and over again, but as a much more vital need in supplying human nourishment. Egypt is a hot country, and the fellah's work makes him sweat, so that thirst affects him more than most other people.

Where the owner of an *'ezba* has installed a pump, the fellaheen may get their water from an artesian well. If their village is on the river bank, they will use water from the Nile, which is silty but fresh-running. But more often than not they can drink only brackish and stagnant water from the irrigation canals.

In these, men and animals cleanse and relieve themselves; vegetables, clothes, and crockery are washed, and carrion is thrown away: and this is the place to which women come to get "drinking water". They bring it home in the early evening, in their ewers or tins, to fill up the great pot, or *zir*, that stands against the house wall. Each fellaha brings back about six gallons each evening for the next day's use. This water she adds to what already remains in the *zir*, so that the bottom is never dry, and never cleaned. The water stands all night, so that some of the dirt settles. It also cools, owing to evaporation through the porous clay. As for the drops which filter through, and which might be used to fill the drinking-pots with pure water for the morning, they simply run to waste in puddles or are drunk by the fowls.

The Government, however, is busily studying the question of supplying drinking-water to the villages, and numerous plans have been made.

Men have always added something to water to give it a taste. The fellah is no exception. Wine he does not drink,

Paradoxical as it may seem, there appears to be a relation between the increase in this "drug habit" and the development of perennial irrigation. It has in fact been proved that this invention, which has doubled Egypt's wealth, has also encouraged bilharzia and ankylostomiasis. These diseases weaken the fellah and reduce his power to work. He seeks relief in the stimulant readiest to hand. As the men, who spend their lives in mud and water, are more affected by these diseases than the women, they are also more addicted to this "black tea" (**).

The cultivation of tobacco, which was brought into Egypt at the beginning of the seventeenth century, was forbidden by a decree of 25th June, 1890. Imported in the raw state from Greece, Turkey and Japan, and processed in Egypt, it is too dear for most of the fellaheen. As with coffee, it is in much greater use in the towns (**).

As a rule the fellaheen eat three meals a day ; at sunrise before leaving for work (*futûr*) ; about 10 o'clock, in the field (*ghâda*) ; and at home at dusk (*'asha*). The fellaheen always sit cross-legged on the ground, and eat with their fingers.

Those at work usually eat their lunch (*ghâda*) in the open air and in company, each taking his food from the plate or enamel pot his wife has brought him, while the water bottle passes from hand to hand.

The chief meal is supper, which consists of warm cooked food eaten with the family. Cooking is done with oil over a Primus stove, or in a household oven fed with stewed cow-dung (*gilla*).

The fellaheen do not go in for cattle-rearing, and as meat is expensive they cannot eat much of it. They have mutton or beef at most once a week, and at least on the two great festivals, or when an animal is killed by accident. This means an orgy, at which everyone puts away tremendous helpings of food. Every now and again some rich man, for a vow or a funeral, kills an ox or *gamoossa* and gives away its meat ; then the poorest can have a feast for nothing.

Those who live on the banks of the Nile, a large canal, or a lake, use nets to catch small fish, which they cook in oil. But most of them are limited to vegetables. Onions (*bassal*), turnips (*lift*), green peppers (*filfil*) and cucumbers (*khiyâr*) are eaten raw. Vegetables which they cook are ladies' fingers (*bâmia*) and *molokhiya* (Jew's mallow) (**), both of

with no crumb. There are no public bakeries except in the towns, but every family bakes its own bread two or three times a week. In Upper Egypt the fellah's loaf is rather smaller, being about six inches across, though thicker. A labourer in the district of Armant told the author that he used to eat ten a day. 252 [265] 262

The ordinary food of the fellah, then, consists of bread, which he makes from maize of his own growing, and vegetables from the edge of his field, or others of poorer quality that his wife buys at the market, with the occasional addition of cheese, when not all the milk of the *gamoossa* has been sold. Briefly, he eats the cheapest products obtainable in the neighbourhood.

His diet is neither varied nor abundant. Does this mean that he is underfed? It is certainly the usual view. On the other hand, one authority (**) finds that the foods—and even the water — which make up the fellah's diet contain a normal mineral content. The work, health and physical strength of the fellah seem to confirm this opinion, yet the increase of pellagra, and the very high proportion (perhaps 80%) of recruits for military service turned down, would seem to prove malnutrition. [164] [167] [702]

So the black soil, like the tongue in Aesop's proverb, is at once the best and the worst of things, giving the fellah both strength and sickness.

The mineral content of the food crops that it nourishes strengthens the men who eat them.

The germs and parasites which infect the sodden soil weaken the men who live on it and drink from it. [164]

From this interplay of natural forces, in spite of everything, a certain balance has been set up which has made the fellaheen a sturdy stock.

This is what justifies the view that the fellah's greatest affliction does not lie in lack of cleanliness, in disease, high mortality, or all the physical distress so far described, and to be further studied under the heading of housing. His real misery lies elsewhere. 164 515

311
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material is used, that is to say the nearest available earth. 361
Thus large holes have been created, which have been dug 316
deeper and wider, and have then filled up with water. These
are the *birkas* or village ponds, which serve as drinking- [515
troughs for animals, as swimming-pools for children, and 481]
sometimes as sources of water for the housewife.

The Government has had fifty-odd of these hotbeds of 164
disease filled in, not without meeting opposition from the 657
fellaheen, whose habits and customs have thus been disturbed.
Eighteen such ponds needed 10,000 cubic metres of earth.

Not far from the *birka*, still outside the village, is the 243
*gurn*, or winnowing and threshing-floor. This is a flat 251
patch of ground covered with cow-dung and earth, which has
been levelled and trodden down. Its size is proportionate
to the number of families that use it. The *gurn* is common
property, and nobody can appropriate it. It is big enough
for ten groups to work at a time, until all have winnowed
their corn. It also serves as a public square for meetings,
though often an adjacent piece of waste ground supplements
it for this purpose. Not far away can be seen a great rubbish 364
heap made of dirt, dung and carrion. This heap would over- 744
top the houses, if the dogs and birds of prey did not come
regularly to reduce it, and if the fellaheen did not take manure
from it. It would be an even greater danger to public
health than the *birka*, if the sun did not disinfect it.

Still outside the village, particularly in the Fayum 231
and in Middle Egypt, there may be square towers, as much as 343
thirty feet high, banded in black and white. Their heavy
base, seven yards by four, gives them the appearance of forts,
but they are in fact pigeon-cotes. You can see them assailed,
at sunset, each by a cloud of from fifteen to twenty thousand
pigeons coming back to roost after feeding among the fields.
The construction of these "houses", requiring an outlay of
from L.E. 200 to L.E. 300 each, is a specialised trade. It is
beyond the means of our fellaheen, and can be undertaken
only by an *omda* or big landowner. In the South a pigeon-
cote is often built on a corner of the rooftop, thus raising the
skyline of the village; but as a rule these houses with pigeon-
cotes, whether built-on or independent, do not form part of
the village itself. They stand apart, and can be distinguished
by their extra storey, their more pretentious appearance,
and their gardens. Such are the owner's villa on an *ezba*, or

am an Egyptian". Though far more truly an Egyptian than most political figures, he is unconscious of belonging to a nation. This explains why, in the nationalist movement which swept over Egypt after the end of the first Great War until she obtained independence, the world of the fellaheen took no part. Nation, liberty, politics, these are words and notions beyond their understanding.

During the first Great War the English recruited a native contingent, the Labour Corps, to defend Egypt from the Turkish attack on the Suez Canal. These "volunteers" had to be enlisted by force, with even more difficulty than for other forced labour. The same lack of patriotism explains the distaste of the fellaheen for military service. The 24,000 soldiers of the Egyptian Army are almost all recruited from among them. In practice the law of 1902 does not apply in all its rigour except to them. Government officials and their sons; only sons, eldest sons whose fathers are dead, helpless, or over sixty; students; ministers of religion; and invalids are all exempt.

A man liable to service is at the mercy of the lot between the ages of 19 and 27. When the lot falls on him he is enlisted for five years. To ensure his rejection he may put out one of his eyes, or cut off a couple of fingers. He will get into debt to buy himself off from military service, or register as a student. If he can, he will hide or escape. As many as 35% of the recruits shirk their service.

When there is no way out, and he cannot avoid leaving home to join the army, the family receives condolences and abandons itself to mourning as if for a bereavement. To leave the village is like going abroad. *Partir, c'est mourir.* "Enlistment in the army is the passport to town life. Everything in the countryside grieves and protests — ox, plough, *saqia*, *gamoossa* and all" (Guindi).

The conscript will be sadly missed on the land. It is not surprising that the fellaheen prefer to pay twenty or even a hundred pounds to avoid service, even if they are to be burdened with debt for a very long time.

This is not to say that they make bad soldiers. The fellaheen are men that know how to handle a gun, and the victorious armies of Mohamed Aly and Ibrahim Pasha were composed of them. That is ancient history, but it

of Egypt in 1937 there were 7,947,193 men to 7,957,332 women. As nearly everyone marries, the inference is obvious. It may be, too, that Moslem customs have been counteracted to some extent by natural law and by Christian influence as represented in the Coptic family. In any case, years of work and suffering together, children, and a wife's good care create an almost unbreakable bond.

The temperament of the fellaheen, especially of the women, is very ardent and sensual. Marriage is to them less an affair of love than one of sexual attraction and reproduction.

The fellah's wife usually enjoys better health than her husband, who is weakened by bilharzia. She is younger, and despite Islam has had considerable freedom in her own affairs since the most ancient times. Village tradition requires on pain of death that she should be physically a virgin when she marries, but mentally she has ceased to be so long before. Since childhood she has been aware of her parents' intercourse, which is quite open owing to lack either of privacy or of modesty. The conversation of the women, even before young girls, turns often on these subjects, not perhaps viciously, but certainly without restraint. They tell each other of the charms and stratagems with which to please and hold their menfolk.

The men, who are more reserved and by their way of life utterly materialistic, understand only sexual love. They revel in it, each with his own wife, and are kept faithful less by virtue than by village law. Adultery leads immediately to bloodshed, and prostitutes are beyond their means.

The heat of passion is short-lived. At thirty a fellah woman is no longer attractive, but the children she has borne her husband bind him to her. Both want children above everything else. To the wife they mean social prestige, for barrenness is a disgrace and the chief cause of polygamy and divorce (**). To the father they represent helpers and successors, who will allow him to rest and give orders. Accordingly families are large. The average number of children is five, and this presupposes eight to ten births. The older they grow the more important does the mother become.

Another thing that binds the man to his wife is her wisdom and authority, which are often greater than his. A fellah proverb has it that 'Man is a river, woman a dyke'.

# I

## THE TAḲRÎFA

THIS is common in the villages and in most of the cities. It affects the person afflicted with *ḳarfa*, which is chronic intestinal catarrh. The manner of treatment is such that it forces upon the sick person strict dieting, so that he only eats a little bread with salt and pepper after midday. In the morning he goes daily to the "old woman" who seats him before her with his lower extremities extended, while she remains behind him stretching her limbs out in the same way. Then she squeezes him with her hands against her chest, and rubs his stomach with increasing violence. After all this she squeezes his head, for the space of half an hour, with great force, the result of which is often death. She does all this without heeding or fearing evil consequences.

And would that she were satisfied with what she has now done after this manner! But now she brings a piece [p. 9] of cloth which she wraps round the neck of the patient (the dumb animal! nay, the deaf stone!) and chokes him until he loses consciousness. She thinks nothing of this, although such an "operation" often results in the death of the wretched patient. (We may seek to excuse her by saying that it is not her fault, because the rules of the "prescription" force her to do it) Next she repeats that operation many times in succession and ends up by giving the patient half a lemon dipped in a mixture of oven ashes, salt and black pepper. Sometimes the invalid has to endure this for a full month.

As for the diet, it is the best part of the medicine; but there is no merit in that due to the old woman, because she does not order it with the intention of healing the sick, but to make the rubbing of his stomach easy for herself. The extraordinary thing is that she asserts that the whole of the benefit is in the

4:Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 MR13 Fellahin MR13
(ca. 1890)



choking, and that the speed with which the disease declines depends proportionately upon the employment of violence or gentleness in that " operation." But the most astonishing thing is that the sick one, if recovery be vouchsafed him, goes home loud in the praise of that " old woman," saying, " The disease was creeping about in my feet in a terrifying manner."

And what did this creeping amount to (had this inexperienced fool known) except the numbness of his nerves resulting from the compression of the spinal cord, and the suffusion of the brain ? And were it not for the fact that he has but few days left to spend in his folly, the deceitfulness of the " prescription " of that old ogress would disappear. As for the lemon and the common salt, sometimes they are of advantage if the sourness of the stomach be slight, but they cause serious injuries if it be severe. And since the " old woman " who " prescribed " this is ignorant of these [p. 10] details, her making use of the salt and the lemon mingled with oven dust in curing—or rather in killing—her patient was only for the purpose of intensifying the imagination and gilding the deceit.

## II

## THE MASH'ŪMA

THE common people mean thereby ill-omened (fevers). Their " prescriptions " would make a bereaved widow laugh ! For example, if the village be under a fortunate star, and there be found in it " the bone of the unbeliever "—one of the bones of the metatarsus—which is the stock in trade of one of the " old women," or of whoever gains possession of it, it is far ahead of all neighbouring towns and villages. A very old man, one of those who were present at the Siege of Sebastopol, related to me that he almost met his death in this siege whilst he was occupied in extracting this bone from a corpse in the firing line.

4: Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 (ca. 1890) MR13 Fellahin MR13



harm, this stone rescues one from harm after one has fallen. Both in the case of a confined woman, and also of those afflicted with purulent ophthalmia, it is rubbed and its water drunk.[1] Our experience is that the harm done by the *kabbās* is greater than that done by the rest of its brethren which are strung with it on the cord of absurdities and vanities, because the harm of these is limited to their delaying the patient from calling in a doctor; but *it* is harmful on account of its rubbing upon the *maḥār* (or mother of pearl shell which is employed), as a result of which hard particles fly off which do not agree with the ailing eye, for when they are put into it the cornea becomes ulcerated. As is obvious, there is extreme danger in this.

## V

## TREATMENT FOR THOSE AFFLICTED WITH LEPROSY AND SYPHILIS

SELDOM do the people of the villages and the remote places treat themselves properly for the diseases which trouble them. In consequence you see among them people afflicted with leprosy, syphilis and elephantiasis. When these diseases sorely oppress them, they go off to the village of Balkamūna in the Gharbīya Province, where there is to be found a man famous in all the provinces of Lower Egypt, named Al-Ḥāgg Aḥmed. They complain to him of their pain. He immediately uncovers the patient, splits the flesh of his back and extracts from it pieces of the muscles or sinews. He then sprinkles over the wound certain powders, the best known of which is blue

[1] [This last statement requires some elucidation. The *ḥagar-al-kabbās* is a small stone which is rubbed on a mother-of-pearl shell (*maḥāra*) into which drops of water from a *ḳulla*, or earthenware jar, are let fall. This water becomes whitish after a little, and is then drunk by the patient, or in the case of eye-disease, as mentioned above, it is used as an eye-lotion. Hence the injury done by the particles of the shell to the cornea. Miss W. S. Blackman in her book, *The Fellaḥin of Upper Egypt* (p. 203) mentions this "cure" and gives an interesting photographic record. She asserts, however, that it is called *ḥagar eṭ-ṭarfā* (stone of the tamarisk). Tr.]

4:Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 MR13 Fellahin MR13
(ca. 1890)



tutty (sulphate of copper), the very thing which hastens the destruction of the patient. Do not enquire about the wealth of this quack. I have been informed on good authority that he died last year leaving 35 feddāns [or acres] of very rich and extremely fertile land [p. 17], as well as jewelry to the amount of £800 worth, in spite of the fact that a few years previously he did not possess a thread or a date stone. His practice has been inherited by his eldest son, who even to-day continues to disseminate errors and absurdities among the foolish natives.

For those who are leprous they use a recipe very well-known among the " old women " from ancient times. It is (as follows) to eat every morning for ten days the heads of scorpions, dried over the fire. Then the patient will be cured—if Allah permits it—or else he will perish at the hands of the minions of Satan the Accursed.

There is no doubt that syphilis, leprosy, and elephantiasis are among the most grievous diseases before which many physicians stand abashed. Accordingly it is necessary that those so diseased should make haste to present themselves before a skilled physician, because the drugs which may effect a cure are not easily procurable in the villages. In any case one should employ for syphilis, in the first stages, compounds of mercury ; and, in the second, iodide of potassium and other compounds. As for leprosy, the cure of it is entrusted to the future. In the case of elephantiasis there is no other way but to call in a surgeon.

## VI

## RĪḤ AL-MASH'ŪMĀT

THIS word is made to embrace piles and dysentery. Some people claim [p. 18] that they have been endowed with the faculty of rooting out these diseases. Such a person is a woman in the neighbourhood of Farnawī, one of the villages in the district of Shubrakhīt. When anyone suffering from relaxation

displaced, and that she can by such means put them into their place again. 755

## VIII

## "SPLITTING OF THE EYE" (BAZLAT-AL-'AIN)

THIS is used generally to mean chronic granular ophthalmia. Those afflicted employ for its cure a piece of fleshy red meat[1] which is hung in front of the afflicted eye or eyes.

I do not know any good this piece of meat does except that it quickly becomes a source of putrefaction, and a collector of the different morbid causes which lead to the complete loss of the patient's eye [p. 22]. [164]

## IX

## AMULETS[2]

THE common people constantly have recourse to those who monopolize the art of making amulets, in order to obtain help by their means when calamity troubles them and sickness makes them complain. Whenever a person is afflicted by some hysterical weakness or nervous disease, his relatives say of him that he is certainly bewitched, or in possession of a *jinnī*. They do not know even yet that sorcery and the interpenetration of bodies (by evil spirits) are absurd and falsified by all evidence. No intelligent person has ever accepted such things, unless what Hārūt and Mārūt[3] introduced in order to 751 754 753 976

[1] [Sometimes instead, a small bored red bead, usually a carnelian (*'aḳīḳ*) is suspended from the head of the sufferer. Tr.]

[2] [*Tamā'im*, plural of *tamīma*. Tr.]

[3] [These are the names of two rebellious angels of Babylon, who were noted magicians. According to the Koran, ii, 96, the devils at the time of King Solomon taught mankind sorcery "*and what had been revealed to the two angels in Babylon, Hārūt and Mārūt.*" The identification of the names is uncertain. They may be of Zoroastrian origin. Consult the *Encyclopedia of Islam, sub voce;* and Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, 1926, pp. 146-8. Margoliouth (in the *Moslem World*, 1928, p. 74) endeavours to trace their names to the Jamnes and Mambres or Jannes and Jambres, the magicians of the time of Moses (2 Timothy III. 8), and of the N.T. Apocrypha (Gospel of Nicodemus v. 5). Tr.]

# FOLK MEDICINE IN MODERN EGYPT

[p.24] The North African (or Moorish) quacks have a ready market in Egypt because it is the common belief of the deluded people of that land that the Moors have great ability in casting out the Jinn from the bodies of mankind. I saw an example of this two years ago, when I was called in to treat a person suffering from chronic meningitis. Whilst I was with him one day, suddenly those present stood up out of respect. I turned round to know the reason why, and beheld a man, a Moor with a long beard, of a ghastly colour and squalid appearance. He had entered the room, and those present were going up to him and kissing his hand to obtain a blessing thereby. I asked who he was, and was informed that he was Al-Ḥāgg Muḥammad of Tlemcen, and that he had been brought in in order to drive out the accursed devil that had entered into the body of this poor wretch, and had made him toss upon a bed of pain and suffering.[1] When I heard this, I said, Allah help us! The Moorish Shaikh then took something out of his bag and threw it into a flaming fire, which they brought him at his request. At once there went up a smoke which almost choked the bystanders. Those who feared for their lives went out of the room, and contented themselves with watching from the door what else might happen. I myself remained, I am glad to say, with the others inside. I saw him after this incensing " operation " arise and approach the patient, and tie one of his big toes with a thread of silk, the end of which he himself held in his hand. Next he began saying to those present, " Verily the *jinnī* which is in the patient, is one of the children of the unbelieving kings, and he will only go out from the body by being condemned and despised and ill-treated. So it is you, who are here present, who must beat him." He pointed to the sick patient, and two of those present [p. 25] procured pieces of cane, bared their forearms and began beating him furiously, whilst he was crying for mercy and groaning. And the wonder of it was that the father of the poor fellow, who had up till then been treating him with clemency and gentleness, was one of the two who undertook to expel the *jinnī* from the body of the patient, although if they had only known it they were really trying to drive the

[1] [The term generally used to describe such a person is *mu'afrit*, which means possessed by an evil spirit, or *'afrit*. Tr.]

the effect anticipated from it will depart without avail. For a certain friend, whom I know, they wrote an amulet which did not produce the desired result, in spite of his strict adherence to their wishes. (This was only that Allah might reveal to him their falsehood and wickedness.) It so happened that when this friend was in despair he exercised his skill on the covering of the talisman, which was [p. 38] of lead, until he opened it. When the paper inside it appeared, he found it did not contain anything at all in the way of writing. Yet he did not cease in his mind to place some credence in the soundness of amulets and talismans, for when he saw that the circumstances were such, he was afraid in his mind lest the writing had flown away because he desired an acquaintance with what was inside it, and so he did not stop performing the requirements prescribed to him by the quacks. What added to his hallucination was the fact that he told his case to an ignoramus, led astray like himself, and he began upbraiding him for what he had done, and proved to him that no one dared to do what he had done unless he had been blinded, and the sign-posts of his vision had been effaced.

Let us return to the shell-diviners. These women do not confine themselves merely to enticing people into their nets in the normal way, but they vie with one another in practical "healing." They have thus often been the cause of the setting of the sun of life for many persons of note both men and women. One, whose word I cannot doubt, informed me that he was inhabiting a neighbouring dwelling in which was a girl suffering from chlorosis ("*yellowness*" [sic]) whose mother went to one of the shell-diviners and informed her of her daughter's condition. The "old wife" assured her that a *jinnī* had fallen in love with her daughter, and had entered into every part of her body and was the cause of her complaint.

When our poor friend heard that, she could not resist throwing herself at the feet of the "old wife," beseeching her to take pity and cast out the *jinnī*. After pretending to refuse and put difficulties in the way, the "old wife" at length granted her request, and accompanied her to her dwelling. As soon as she saw the patient [p. 39] she ordered them to bring her half a pound of metallic lead and melt it over a fire. When

4: Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 MR13 Fellahin MR13
(ca. 1890)



gence. Ibn Kalada[1] has said: "He who desires to sell his life cheaply let him give a little of his time to fair women."

## XVIII

## THE 'UḲĀD AND THE KHŪṢA

THE *'Uḳād* is a thread of wool which is tied in seven knots, over each of which a special incantation is pronounced, and it is blown upon by people who are well-known for this "operation." The *Khūṣa* is made of the branches of palm-trees which the patient presents on the morning of some Friday at the instigation of the *Faḳīh*, who receives it and recites over it a number of incantations and protective circular charms (*Taḥāwīṭ*). Both of these are used in the curing of colds and fevers. This is why you see many children with them round their necks, because they are more liable to these two ailments. In the villages a mother is considered negligent of her child if she does not place round its neck an *'Uḳād* of this sort, which will keep him, as she asserts, from illness.

## XIX

## BARRENNESS ('UḲM)

ONE of the best "remedies" for barrenness is to walk over a person who has been killed. This is a famous old "remedy," even with inhabitants of large towns. It is long since we used to see, when our professors were lecturing on Anatomy in the Ḳaṣr al-'Ainī College [p. 45] many ladies coming to the dissecting room in order that they might pass over the dead, with this object in view.

Some women who are barren carry a silique of wool dipped in

[1] [This is Al-Ḥārith ibn Kalada, a contemporary of the Prophet Muḥammad, and at one time a celebrated physician at the court of the Persian King Anūshirwān. Tr.]

Barrenness, they believe, sometimes arises also from the entering in unto the mother of a woman who has weaned her child. The " cure " in this case, according to their statement, is for the barren woman to carry a rag of wool wet with the milk of a woman who has recently weaned her child.

## XXIII

## THE ḲARÎNA

THE Bedouins name this the " Heat " (*Ḥarāra*). This name is used generally for the class of diseases of the throat (the original symptom of which is difficulty in breathing) such as diphtheria (*ḵẖunnāḳ*) and convulsion and drying up of the uvula, and the like. The " prescriptions " of the " old wives " are self-contradictory in regard to its " cure." Some of them think that the correct thing is cauterisation [p. 49] of the child upon its frontal and terminal crown (*yāfūḵẖ*). The child, however, finds relief from their folly, inasmuch as there is soon set up inflammation of the brain (meningitis), of which it dies.

" And he who does not die of cautery will die of something else ;
The " prescriptions " are many but the death is one."

Others again hold to the belief in replacing the cauterisation by scarifying with a razor instead, on both sides (front and back). This is the method followed by the Bedouin. The Arabs of Mariūṭ and al-Ḥāgir instead of all these, bore two holes in the child's ears through which they pass a thread of red silk. The " old wives " have different absurd theories as to the cause of this disease in children. Some of them claim that every male child has a sister (*ukẖt*) among the Jinn,

4: Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 (ca. 1890) MR13 Fellahin MR13 Egypt MR1

# FOLK MEDICINE IN MODERN EGYPT

## XXVI

## THE TANFĪḤA

E F 164

THIS is one of the absurdities, the validity of which has overcome the minds of the simple in our happy country. The people of Upper Egypt call it the *Talwīḥa* (" *swinging* "), but amongst the inhabitants of the towns, such as Cairo and Alexandria, it is called (...) (sic) [Al-Mu'aumad (?)] and so also by the people of the provinces of Lower Egypt. With all its names it means the acute relaxation of the bowels, which attacks very young children. The " cure " is as follows: The " old wife " orders the child to be placed in a spacious woollen cloth which is wrapped round it several times till it is used up. Then two women take hold of the ends of this cloth, with the wretched child imprisoned in it, and turn it round following a perpendicular circular motion during more than a quarter of an hour. This, in truth, is the easiest and quickest way to kill children, because the child, who has the misfortune to be born to the person whose thoughts are controlled by the power of [p. 53] delusion and ignorance, is seized with concussion of the brain due to the wicked circular motion, and dies from lack of breath. In the cities mothers procure drugs from the " old wives "; the one which I have seen most commonly used being white lead (ceruse) (or carbonate of lead), mixed with the white of an egg. Now it is well-known that ceruse contains poisonous materials. So when it is placed on the child's belly it screams with pain. Then the mother continues in the thought that his weeping is only from the original pain which was the cause of her treating it with such a harmful remedy.

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## XXVII

## " THE STRANGER " (GHARĪBA)

F 164 000

THE common people use this term generally for a number of eye ailments, especially ṣha'ra or trichiasis.[1] Many women

[1] [Introversion of the eyelid.]

4:Walker · E-4 (no date) 1934 MR13 Fellahin MR13
(ca. 1890)



Many women
756 in the villages are famed for the "cure" of them. One of them is known as Sitt Umm Ḥusain. She resides in the village
757 of Ibrāhīm Aghā in the district of Shubrakhīt. Her "specific" is to take a piece of the hollow stalk of the bamboo (*ghāb Fārisī*), and split it lengthways down the middle, and place in it the skin of the patient's eyelid. In view of its flexibility it squeezes upon the eyelid and hinders its nourishment, so that it becomes violently inflamed, perhaps extending to the neighbouring parts, and destroying the eye. The result[1] of this ill-omened treatment is that the part squeezed becomes affected
● [164] with gangrene, the eyelid becomes separated from the eyeball, and the latter becomes exposed to all external influences, great and small, there being now nothing to protect it from injury, not to mention that the patient through this "operation," becomes ugly and hideous, the sight of him frightening children and offending grown up people.

Many others besides Sitt Umm Ḥusain there are who go round the villages rooting out eyelids as if they thought Allah created them unintentionally.

## XXVIII

## HEALING OF THOSE BORN BLIND (CATARACTOUS)

757 A NATIVE of Mandūra in the Gharbīya Province claims that
298 he has done some of the things for which Jesus (on whom be peace!) was noted, and has made the blind to see (or, rather, to describe him by what results from his works, he gives those who have eyes, eyes to see). What he does is, he anoints the ophthalmic patient with *kohl*, which he makes himself, and in ten days he is "cured."

I was informed by one of the leading people of the Buḥaira Province about some antimony [*kohl*] which he bought from

[1] [Dr. A. F. MacCallan, writing in the *Egyptian Gazette* (April 7th, 1927) on the development of Ophthalmology in early Arabic Literature mentions this popular Fellahin "cure," and adds: "*The trichiasis entropion is occasionally cured* (by this method), *but always at the expense of a shortened upper lid, and the frequent production of lagophthalmos.*" Tr.]

4: Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 MR13 Fellahin MR13
(ca. 1890)



this quack at a crushing price. When I examined it I found the bulk of it to be powder of ginger [*zangabīl*]. All the people of the provinces believe that these substances are exciting and burning in proportion to their usefulness. But what I say is, that the employment of ginger as *kohl* is very like the use of the powder of *Jakarītī* (?) one of the plants of Brazil. (It is violently corrosive and is used to produce artificial purulent ophthalmia).

The Moorish quacks employ in cases of ophthalmia a medicine which one of them divulged to me as a great secret, saying that it was composed as follows:

(1) One drachm of the liver of a cock with ten claws;[1]
(2) One drachm of clarified fluid from the eyes of an old hoopoe[2]; [p. 56] (3) five drachms of *ḥūnīz* (i.e. "*the black seed.*")[3]

Boil the whole over a slow fire, and after it becomes dry and powdery, let it be used as *kohl*; then the old hazinesses will become clear, and it will put an end to the ulcerations of the eye and cataract.

## XXIX

## THE INFLUENCE OF GUISES AND TITLES AND APPELLATIONS

FATE has decreed that the Egyptian should neglect his rights and rate himself lower than the Westerner with his different origin and nationality. So you see him not only being let down in the eyes of Europeans (who have some right for glorying and boasting on account of the benefits they have attained in Science and Civilisation), but also in the eyes of such

[1] [The colloquial word used is *mu'awshar*, and it is said that when such a cock enters the house and crows, an angel will appear. Tr.]
[2] [The *hudhud*, or *hidhid*, the celebrated bird in the Solomon Saga.]
[3] [This is the seed of the Fennel flower, black cummin, and is often named in the vernacular, *habbat-al-baraka*, the "seed of the blessing," because its other name, the "*black seed*" is not propitious. See the *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes, XII*, 207. Tr.]

4: Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 (ca. 1890) MR13 Fellahin MR13 Egypt MR1



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the medical sciences, but were all liable to be duped by him. One of his claims was that he could extract the heart and the liver and replace them by the corresponding parts of a dog. We rejected this statement on account of its absurdity and want of agreement with the canons of medicine. When he saw our opposition he said, "Do not wonder at that for I have cured this last year 40,000 [p. 59] patients suffering from *ascites abdominalis* in Mecca alone." Then we became more sceptical than ever of his statements seeing that the whole population of Mecca is not more than 60,000, and two thirds of them have not always this disease. That would be absurd. So, when he rose to go, he invited a number of us to accompany him, amongst whom was as it happened that excellent Doctor 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Efendī Fahmī, chief physician of the Government Hospital at Assiut, and Doctor 'Abdallāh Efendī Shaukat, head of the Ḳaṣr al-'Ainī Hospital.

When we arrived at his house we found him the centre of the afflicted and the refuge of the unfortunate. Crowds streamed towards his dwelling from every side so that they blocked the way for the passer-by. When we were seated he began "treating" his patients. This was after he had laid aside his robes and put on others which made him look like the successor of Al-Ḥāriṯh ibn Kalada.[1] Among the crowd he had a girl afflicted with filthy suppurating scrofulous glands, so he called on his servant Ṣiddīḳ to prepare a poultice of *lait caillé* (*leben zebādī* or *yaghourt*). Then he himself brought forward a dish from which he took out a little powder of sweet marjoram which he scattered on the poultice, and put this on the neck of the poor girl, whose mother took her away to where she might roll about on account of the burning pain (after she had satisfied the monetary demands of the professed physician).

E F [164] [278]

Anyone who is acquainted with science knows that it is not possible to guard against the harmful effects of gathered pus except by extracting it by means of surgical instruments.

EF 756 278

After the sick-visitation had come to an end we went up with him that he might show us his chamber of drugs. We found it a spacious place with hundreds of vessels containing

[1] [See note above p. 43.]

4:Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 MR13 Fellahin MR13
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drugs, salts and acids and alkalis with labels, on which were written their names in Latin; in very indistinct letters on account of their age. The bystander could not help suspecting that this was merely the leavings of some pharmacist, which this man had bought up after the death of the owner.

On turning my head to the right I saw written on one of these bottles " sulphuric acid," so I asked his lordship about the contents of the bottle, in order to try him, that it might put an end to my suspicions regarding him. He answered straightway, " This is oil of mandragora, or apples of the Jinn." Then he produced a vessel gilded on the outside and said, " This is the *Kohl* (stibium) of the Forty. It puts and end to obscuration of the surface of the eye, and I produced it myself by boiling it in oil of rose mixed with the grease of serpents forty times." He generously presented each of us with some to experiment with, but when we had left his dwelling we threw what was in our hands on the ground, except one of us who was determined to try it. He put a little of it in his eye, and the next day was afflicted with ophthalmia of the cornea which took him fifteen days' treatment to get over its evil effects.

Mark the difference, O you who are intelligent and skilful, between the dwelling of this ignoramus aping the physician and [p. 61] the clinic of one of our keen native doctors. You will find the difference distinctly visible. While the former rejoices in success and prosperity, the latter suffers ill-luck and neglect.

## XXX

## HEADACHE (ṢUDĀ')[1]

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THIS is applied to many illnesses, but is only rarely an original illness. It arises from decay in the bone of the occiput,

[1] [Professor E. G. Browne, in his Fitzpatrick Lectures on *Arabian Medicine* mentions (p. 4) that this noun of pain appears in the Latin version of the Ḳānūn of Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) as Soda (*Sermo universalis de Soda*), a term which must have bewildered those without the Arabic original. Tr.]

4: Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 (ca. 1890) MR13 Fellahin MR13



or from inflammation in the nerves. For that reason there are few who do not complain of it every day. As the numbers of the afflicted increase so, proportionately, do the methods of the quacks in claiming to "cure" it. One way, which I know by personal experience, is the "beating" of the temple-vein. They mean by this the "cutting" of the temple-vein [with a razor][1] because this is the place where one feels the pain more than any other. The fame of a barber in the villages depends on his skill in the "cutting" of the vein. A man, called Shurbagī, on the estate of Yūsuf Pāshā Kemāl in the district of Shubrakhīt has a monopoly of the "beating of the vein." For that reason the unfortunate from all villages make for him, pouring in to him from every quarter. He has fixed his fee for "beating the vein" at one dollar for each poor person whom this ailment has driven to him; while the rich pay according to their appearance and as they wish (for there is no way of stopping the generous). The belief in the efficacy of this "cure" for *Ṣudā'* by "cutting the temple vein" is widespread in a like degree in the small villages and large towns of Egypt. I have seen in the year [p. 62] just passed, in the Ḳaṣr al-'Ainī Hospital, more than six persons *in extremis* through loss of blood due to an "operation" of this kind, not to mention those who will have died before they could be brought in, or who fainted through heart weakness.

When the whole corporation of barbers was hostilely attacking the temple-vein, it said to them what has been said very appropriately:

"Someone else did wrong and I am tormented for your sake,
Just as if I were the forefinger of the penitent."[2]

Those who are accustomed to have recourse to cutting the vein as a "cure" for *Ṣudā'* will find in fact a temporary relief after this "operation," resulting from the dulling of sensation due to the loss of a large amount of blood by effusion; but when the blood supply returns and the patient recovers his wonted health he suffers violent pains and cruel aches once more.

[1] [For an actual photographic illustration of this "operation" see Miss Blackman, *op. cit.*, p. 214. Tr.]

[2] [When a man is sorry for some action he may bite his finger in remorse. The finger is bitten though it was not to blame. Similarly with the temple-vein. Tr.]

# FOLK MEDICINE IN MODERN EGYPT

## XXXI

## SCIATIC NERVE ('IRḲ AL-INS)

By this they mean sciatica (*'irḳ al-nisā*), or nervous pains chiefly in the hip. The causes of this disease are many, such as hereditary venereal disease (which is cured by its own medicines) and the effect of cold and inflammation in the sciatic nerve, or inflammation of the spinal cord.

[p. 65.] One of those who were famous for the " treatment " of this disease was a man of the people of Edkū [near Alexandria in Lower Egypt]. He takes his patient in the early morning outside the town until they come to a wide plain in which the box-thorn[1] grows. (It is a kind of shrub). He then chooses as much of it as equals the size of the patient's side, and recites over it charms[2] which he keeps on repeating for a long time. After that he scrapes aside the sand which surrounds its root, and when it is uncovered, he pulls it up. He next goes to a fire, which he had previously kindled, and in which are iron pins. He then begins cauterizing the bush in every one of its joints while all the time he is busily reciting. At the end of all these processes, he digs up some earth, buries the shrub, and the patient is " cured."

The explanation given of these " cures " is that sciatica is a disease due to the influence of the *Jinn*, and the charming drives out the *jinnī* from the body of the patient, and imprisons him in the shrub, while the cauterizing of this kills him inside it. It is marvellous that persons of any enlightened intelligence should absolutely refuse the treatment of physicians and betake themselves to this man who is just like all other quacks. He orders the patient not to publish the secret, for if he do, the disease will return worse than before. I was told this story by a friend who was thrown into this man's hands by fate. And the extraordinary [p. 66] part of the story is that imagination had obtained such a hold over him on account of

[1] [Arabice, *'ausag*, Latine, *Ausegum*. See M. Steinschneider, *Heilmittelnamen der Araber*, in *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, xii, 222. Tr.]

[2] ['*Azā'im*, plural of '*Azīma*.]

his having divulged the secret to me that in two days after this, the disease returned to him through imagination, just as it had left him under the same influence.

## XXXII

## "NECK PAIN" (WAG' AL-RAḲABA)

[164] THIS means either hoarseness of the throat or diseases of the tonsils (lōzatēn). The "old wives" "cure" it in two ways. (1) They make the patient hang round his neck a huge bead of red stones, and (2) they order him to swallow a boiled hen's egg at one gulp without chewing. The harm of this latter method will appear from the story reported by the Egyptian newspapers of date 13th November, 1892, about a youth in the Daḳahlīya [Province] in whose throat the egg [165] stuck and he died shortly after. Perhaps this will be a warning to those who are heedless and restrain them from trusting in the nonsense of the "old wives" and the absurdities of foolish individuals.

## XXXIII

## WORM EXTRACTORS (DAWWĀDA)

THESE are a community—the Ghagar and Nawar[1]—whose origin is from Syria; some say from China; and some go so far as to say that they are spread all over the world. They claim that they can "cure" children who cry too much, by extracting the worms (*dūd*) from their foreheads, pretending that this is the cause of their continual crying. Dr. Muḥammad Efendī 'Alī Duwaidār relates that a little child of his family was always crying, so the child's parents summoned

[1] [Gypsies and vagrants. See *Encyclopedia of Islam*, under, *Nūrī*. Tr.]

4: Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 (ca. 1890) MR13 Fellahin MR13



the *Dawwād* ("*worm-extractor*") to "cure" him. These are his words: Whilst I was in the dwelling, this man arrived, and I wished to witness his "operation" myself, only that, before he should direct his attention to the child, according to his wont, I directed my attention to what was in his hand before the beginning of the "operation." I found in it a quantity of cheese worms. When he felt that his trickery was exposed and that he was openly disgraced, he sought safety in flight."[1]

## XXXIV

## WORMS IN THE EYE (DŪD AL-'AIN)

ANOTHER crowd of quacks extract worms from the eye. Most of these worm-extractors are women to whom silly creatures come complaining of cracking of the eye and heaviness of the eyelid. They have already a confused idea that the pain they feel is due to "worms in the eye," whereas in most cases it is nothing but granular ophthalmia.[2] The "operation" is as follows: The "doctress" in spite of the patient's dislike, brings a piece of sugar and, turning back the eyelid of the poor creature, rubs the inside with it, until the fleshy part becomes rubbed away and sticks to the sugar, assuming the appearance of worms.

There is no concealing the dangers of this "operation"; one being the sticking of the eyelids to the ball of the eye. Many women have lost their sight by this ineffective treatment. Perhaps the harm and injury which overtook them may be a warning and admonition to others, so that no one will consent to the absurdities of such imposters.

We counsel people not to accept the "treatment" of the Ghagar [Gypsies] nor to pay attention to their judgments and

[1] [A photographic illustration of such a "cure" will be found in Miss Blackman, *op. cit.*, p. 212. Tr.]

[2] [Trachoma, Arabice, *ramad ḥubūbī* (sic). Dr. Sharaf gives *ḥabībī*. Tr.]

it was taken up by a society in Europe. But the truth is clear that those who thus imitated the "old wives" of Egypt were only seeking after some new and wonderful thing so that people might make a fuss about them. They were denounced by the scientific world of Europe, until they desisted from their error.

## XXXVII

## "THORN OF THE WIND" SHŌKAT-AL-RĪḤ

THIS is a name used generally in the villages for decay (caries) of the bones of the phalanges of the foot or hand, and the accompaniment of this decay with violent inflammation and great swelling. Many people in Buḥaira (Province) have become famous for "curing" it, the best known of them being the Shaikh 'Abd al-Ḥamīd. He has two "treatments" for this, one, old, namely, that the finger of the patient should be burnt with a circular cauterization; the other, new, namely, that the sinews of the muscles should be cut and rooted out along with a part of the substance of the fingers. It is asserted that this latter "method" makes a more radical cure than the former because it is in agreement with modern science. The harm is not confined, however, to the cutting and rooting out of the sinews, but his recommendation to the patient not to wash his wound with water [p. 80] saying that water is "the poison of wounds."

Some people employ a poultice of doves' dung, as I saw last year, for a youth presented himself to me during my stay in the provinces, and on examination I found the nail-phalanx necrotic. So I extracted it and he was well after a few days, though he had remained for sixty days before having it out, enduring in it all kinds of torment.

4:Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 MR13 Fellahin MR13
(ca. 1890)

# FOLK MEDICINE IN MODERN EGYPT

## XXXVIII

## SKIN DISEASES AND SNAKE-CHARMERS

THE common people think that *impetigo* or skin-disease (*karfa*) originates from the fact that the viper blows its poison into the body. For that reason those afflicted betake themselves to the snake-charmers [Rifā'ī Dervishes] and the viper-enchanters [Sa'danī Dervishes].[1] As for the latter, they are the lowest roughs who claim that they have complete authority over serpents and vipers. So they charm by means of oil, that is, they spit into it, and anoint the patient with this oil for the space of three days. Then he is "cured." And it is [p. 81] a vain assertion and worthless belief because scientific and practical experiments prove that the poison of these reptiles does not cause harm except when it touches the blood. The savant Bouchard swallowed capsules containing large quantities of it. They were very nourishing. It is mentioned that the degree of their nourishment was like that of the white of eggs.

And if we see the oil of the charmers sometimes benefiting in the case of *karfa*, that is only because this disease, like some skin diseases, demands for its successful treatment extreme caution against atmospheric injuries, that is, the influence of the outside air. When oil is smeared on, the layer of smearing forms a sort of barrier between them. So no wonder the patient is cured and relieved from the fetter of the disease. For the oil in this case produces softening in the crusts of the skin-disease, then they fall off of themselves. And it is not, as the *Sa'danī* and other triflers assert that this results from their control over serpents. Because if they were speaking the truth, why do they let the serpents injure people at all, and harm mankind with their ill-doing?

[1] [See article by translator on *The Gypsies of Modern Egypt* in the *Moslem World*, July, 1933, p. 289.]

# FOLK MEDICINE IN MODERN EGYPT

## XXXIX

### [p. 82.] THE "FEAR" CUP (ṬĀSAT-AL-TARBA)

THEY say that if there befall a man what throws into his heart nervousness and terror, there is no escape from his being struck either, with venereal disease [*zuhrī*] (there is no need to expose the lies of these folk, since it is generally accepted that venereal disease is contagious and never arises from imagination), or, *yaraḳān* ("jaundice") (which they use generally as a name for nervous diseases). And the "cure" for both of these afflictions is that water should be placed in the "*Fear*" *Cup*.[1] It is a vessel of brass engraved with the figures of birds or inscribed with obscure writings, and after it is exposed to the dew by night, the invalid drinks it and is "cured."

One curious thing is that there is found suspended round the border of the cup forty pieces of brass engraved like the foregoing, and when one of these pieces is lost, there is lost with it the benefit which was to be expected from the taking of the water placed in the cup. I have asked many people about this folly and they have replied: "We found our ancestors doing this and we are driven to do likewise."

*The real cause of the disease.* It is now established that venereal disease is a disease that is contagious, and not produced of itself, but by inheritance from forebears, or the result of secret contact. So that this false opinion is invalidated.

But these influences are the result of fear and perhaps they

[1] [The following is a rough description of this type of medicine bowl from one in the possession of the translator (plate 3). The dimensions of the bowl are 7¼ ins. in diameter and fully 2 ins. in height. The inner cup is 2¼ ins. in diameter and 1¼ in. in height. Round the rim of the inner cup are twenty little holes, from which are suspended forty keys, two from each hole. Each key bears an inscription on each side. These are not easily decipherable, but appear to be some of the *Asmā' al-ḥusnā*, or *most beautiful names of Allah*. A common one is *Ghafūr* (the forgiver). By loosening the central screw the inner cup with its keys may be turned round to any part of the bowl. The inscriptions are too long to translate here. Besides containing well-known passages from the *Koran*, there are likewise pious exclamations and invocations of the archangels, such as, oh Gabriel! (*Yā Gibr'īl*), oh Michael! (*Yā Mikā'īl*) oh 'Azra'īl, etc. On the extreme edge of the bowl there are what appear to be numbers of magical import. A slightly different example is illustrated by Zwemer in his *Influence of Animism on Islam*, p. 180. Tr.]

4:Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 MR13 Fellahin MR13
(ca. 1890)



753 But these influences are the result of fear and perhaps they
152 cause other diseases of a nervous character which are feared
861 especially by the young. And since that is only the result of frightening children with the dark, and with Jinn and the bogey man[1] and other [p. 83] absurdities such as ignorant mothers tell to their children, frightening and terrifying them, the cure for the resultant ills is to eradicate the ignorance of the mothers [562] by education, a thing which is still considered a sin in the East.

## XL

## INCENSING (TABKHĪRA)

757 " And for Syphilis (*tashwīsh*) they ' prescribed ' incensing,
Which an " old wife " among them of the tribe of Basūs prepares.
She recites over it the [Koranic] section of *Iblīs* [=the Devil]
As if Death sent her to go to and fro.
How much money was given for its fabrication ?
How many souls have been disgusted by its fumigation ?
And does their ' incensing ' with vermilion (*zungafr*)
Cure a sick person, when there is decay in the skeleton ? "

Some of the " old wives " in the provinces were famed in past ages for their " cure " of venereal disease by " incensing." It is an ancient practice in the villages until to-day it has attained to such a degree of imagination that the villagers apply the censer (*mabkhara*) to every serious disease, be it V.D. or not.

I witnessed that myself once. An " old wife " came to " incense " a man who had been sick for a long time, and his relatives were bewildered about his disease (because they would not go to a physician) and in fact, he was suffering from [164] retention of urine due to stone. The patient died with the assistance of the " incensing " of the " doctress."

[1] [Literally, the man with (or the father of) the skinned leg (*Abū rigl maslūkh.a*). This bogey corresponds to our Devil on Two Sticks (= Diable Boiteu = Asmodeus, Prince of Demons). See my article in *Folk-Lore*, vol. xxxviii, 4 (Dec., 1927), p. 377. Tr.]

another thing; you will see them coming to the cities and asking in hospitals or pharmacies for it [p. 85] by the name of *yadūr*, meaning potassium iodide. Yes, they are right as to its being beneficial, but not in all attacks of syphilis, seeing that it is proved that it is not the least use in the first two attacks. (And in particular they do not know syphilis from anything else, for they are ignorant of the diagnosis of the disease and consequently miss the cure.)

We have previously hinted at a remedy for syphilis. But in general there is no escape from consulting a physician. The patient who fears for his family, or the family who fear for him, should hasten to get away from the disease, since it is contagious.

## XLII

## "MIXING" (MADHAḲ)

*Madhaḳ* literally means "mixing."[1]

(And in truth they are *mixed* when they err in its treatment.) It is [a name] applied in the villages to a kind of muscular swelling (or rheumatism) which strikes the muscle under the shoulder-blade, and the muscle below the spine sometimes. And they "prescribe" for him who is smitten with it, that he should lean against the door of a room facing the East, with his feet above and his head below, and meeting the ground with his palms so that the weight of his body will be upon them. And he must have filled his mouth with water, and must remain in this position about ten minutes at least, until he becomes giddy (from congestion of the brain) and throws himself to the ground. The harm of this "method" is obvious and useless [p. 86] except to make those who do it like monkeys. Perhaps the patient overturns on to his back or falls upon his *pia mater* [*Arabice* (أم الرأس) "mother of the head"], and there receives the reward of his act, or the result of his folly and his inability to imitate others.

[1] [This "mixing" or ambiguity cannot be translated.]

4: Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 MR13 Fellahin MR13
(ca. 1890)

# FOLK MEDICINE IN MODERN EGYPT

## XLIII

## THE HORN OF THE RHINOCEROS AND POISONS

ALL internal diseases for which the "old wife" is not enabled to perfect a trick to impose on the intellects of the people of the provinces, she attributes in her diagnosis to *Sukwa* [see below]. She says to the patient: "Oh, my son, you have *Sukwa* and nothing will be of any avail except the horn of the rhinoceros, which must be placed in a china vessel and exposed to the dew all night and drunk upon an empty stomach in the morning."

Now the "horn of the rhinoceros" (*karn al-khartīt*) consists of pieces of the horns of cows or of buffaloes. Pilgrims or merchants from the Sudan bring them and spin the tale how that they are the antidote (*tiriāk*) for poisons. Whereas even if they were rhinoceros horns, as they assert, there are no special beneficial qualities in them at all, as far as we know. But it is well known that the volatile salts of the English are extracted from the horns of the hart, or [p. 87] mountain buck, but that is not the rhinoceros. Whereas if we imagined, as they do, that these two are one and the same, they would not have brought a conclusive proof, since on their putting the horn in water the salt in it does not melt so as to be of benefit. But what we do know is that the volatile salts of the English are no good in counteracting poisons (except alcoholic poisoning or intoxication).

It is well-known that the word *Sukwa* is applied generally to pulmonary consumption accompanied by loss of blood on coughing. The patient must be well-fed, and guarded as much as possible from cold. He must leave the place where he caught it for dry warm places, and keep away from crowds and not neglect moderate exercise. And let his people guard against allowing him to spit upon articles or on the ground. (For if they knew that the poison that the "old wife" shuns is expectorated with the saliva, and that healthy people breathe it and fall into the clutches of Death, they would beware of the evil consequences. So let them know that it is one of the most

164 violent of contagious diseases and the hardest to cure). Therefore let them have him spit into a handkerchief or a piece of linen, which is then dipped in tar and afterwards burned.

His relatives should call in a doctor to visit him. It is well known that menfolk do not reckon themselves ill unless they are confined to their rooms and unable to stir out of doors, that is, when the illness has become chronic and incurable. Whereas if it had been receiving attention it would not have been thus, except after a very long time, and at the beginning it would have been possible to repel it with ease. Frequently we have seen people suffering from pulmonary consumption, and in spite of that [p. 88] the answer of one of them to us when we asked him about his disease, was: "Allah forbid, I am not diseased." But before long we see the disease contradicting him, and he is confined to his house. And most of them are fated to die of these diseases for this reason.

It is encumbent on those who are consumptive to attend to the disease at the outset. But I fancy them saying, "And where can we find a doctor to consult every time; the cities are distant, and perhaps we go to consult a doctor and can't find him." I say, it is an easy matter. If the people of the villages desire to have a special doctor for themselves to cure them gratis, without their going to him, and to be at their command, they have only to take the trouble to ask him from the Government on condition that each one of them pays one millième per month (as His Excellency 'Alī Mubārak Pāshā reckoned) and as we demonstrated more than once in the well-known newspaper *al-Mu'ayyad*.[1]

## XLIV

## PAIN OF THE SHIḲḲA

164 THIS is generally applied to diseases of the spinal marrow and colic of the stomach and kidneys. They "prescribe" for the sick that two men should carry him by the head and feet

[1] [See Hartmann: *op. cit. index.*]

4: Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 MR13 Fellahin MR13
(ca. 1890)

# FOLK MEDICINE IN MODERN EGYPT

## XLVII

## MUFATTÁḲA[1]

THE "old wives" make this out of a collection of materials whose number to their statement, reaches forty kinds, the bulk of it of oily fruits. The fat of black beetles is reported to be necessary to the completion of its ingredients. It appears from its composition that it is hard to digest and of an injurious nature. It causes turbidness of digestion and diarrhœa. So it is more harmful than the "bead" of the cow [see above]. But the "old wives" have other compounds besides this, such as "the Seven grains" (سبع حبوب) [see illustration in Miss Blackman, op. cit. p. 79] and "orange jelly" (مطبوخ النارنج).

## XLVIII

## ECZEMA (ṢAFRA)

THIS is a name used generally in the provinces for many skin diseases which are a sort of eczema (*Ḳūb*), and especially for the disease called psoriasis. (I mean the "pearly" variety, because it has scabs shining like mother of pearl). Those afflicted with this disease go to Shaikh Farag Abū Maḥmūd of Munāshela in the district of Shubrakhīt in the Province of Buḥaira. He cauterizes them upon the metatarsus of their feet opposite the tops of the three last toes, and orders them not to go near water for forty days. The strange thing is that this condition does not suit the Fellāḥ whose food comes from sowing [p. 93] especially while he is barefooted. Then how should he not be wet when he is continually immersed?

[1] [This is a kind of sweetmeat or *ḥalāwa*, made of molasses. I had the opportunity given me of tasting it once. If its dark oily appearance does not repel, its taste does. I can understand now after seeing its colour why the rumour goes that it is made from the flesh of black beetles, as the author states. Tr.]

4:Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 MR13 Fellahin MR13
(ca. 1890)



in their phantasies " helpers " (*A'wān*) and spirits (*Jinn*), and they picture mighty happenings which were accomplished at the hands of spirits [p. 11] by those incantations and names, during the absence of their reason in the smoke of *ḥashīsh*; just as the *Shaikha Khaḍra* and her colleagues used *ḥashīsh* in incensing only to stupefy the " remnant " of reason in the woman whom the devils of slander and defamation have deceived. Thus there appears to her eyes, what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the reason of any rational being verified.

## II

## THE KAMARA,[1] OR OPHTHALMIC HOSPITALS IN THE VILLAGES

ALLAH Most High created no land whose people needed to take more care of their eyes than our own land of Egypt, on account of its inhabitants being so subject to dangerous ophthalmia. But He decreed upon the land in past times the lack of many doctors, who are the mainstay of health. Thus the sick, including those suffering from eye-disease, were compelled to appeal to quacks among the ignorant people. With the passage of time the decree of custom became fixed in the minds of the people up to the present time, when medicine has so obviously progressed. Yet we still see great crowds visiting these false physicians to be cured, on the outbreak of diseases. But they only add to their danger and place heavy stumbling blocks [p. 12] in front of the doctor on the day when their " cure " ends in failure, and the patient comes to the cities to be cured of his illness.

In the Gharbīya district there is a woman in a village named *Minyat Ganāḥ*, who has made her house an ophthalmic hospital. Ignorant women seek her out from every quarter, in connection with their different eye-troubles. She has one method to

[1] [It is named in some provinces the *Shiaha*.]

4:Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 MR13 Fellahin MR13
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789 Such people keep on mentioning in detail all the possible things which are to be found in dwelling houses, pretending that all that year no misfortune will overtake the thing whose name is mentioned in this incantation. Strange to say the common people are not the only ones who believe in the imaginings of these devils, but many people of rank also, whom we would think above such futilities. It may be that the experience of the future will erase from the mind all the vain beliefs of the past, for often they were purveyors of destruction, and a means of ruin and mischief.

## VII

## A "MIRACLE"

755 231 ONCE in the provinces I heard a crowd asking a man, a poor *fellāḥ*, about the welfare of his buffalo. He said that it was "cured." I asked concerning the ailment and the curative drug. The man said: For two days the buffalo was yielding milk and blood. So I asked Rūma (an "old wife" of the village) about this question. She advised me to carry a halter of the buffalo at dawn [p. 20] and bury it in a forsaken grave, and, a little before morning, fetch it without anyone seeing me. I did that and the buffalo was "cured."

We hope that our brethren the veterinary surgeons will give us the advantage of the effect of this "remedy." We do not wish to enter into the medical treatment of animals, since they are more knowledgeable than we are regarding it, and to them may there be much gratitude and abundant praise!

## VIII

## MEASLES AND THE ALEXANDRIAN SHIRT

755 ● 124 292 THE *fellāḥīn* are in the habit of "curing" their children, who are smitten with measles, by clothing them in a shirt of

4: Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 (ca. 1890) MR13 Fellahin MR13



755 164 292

silk, coloured red, and named the Alexandrian shirt (*al-ḳamīṣ al-Iskandirānī*). (In reality it is made at Edkū[1] and its neighbourhood.)

It has some alleviating effect on skin trouble, for on account of the softness and smoothness of the shirt the skin is less irritated. But the danger, really, is that in the village there is to be found only one shirt set apart for this purpose. Hence it becomes a means of infection and the transmission of this danger. If each ailing child had a new shirt brought to him it would be favourable for a cure, a cure harmless and often beneficial.

## IX

## "THE BLUE WATER" AND CAUTERIZING THE HEAD

164

HEADACHE (*ṣudā'*)[2] either "moving" or "smiting," is very common [p. 21] in the provinces. Most of the cases we witnessed were among those whose eyes turn backwards and forwards on the occurrence of attacks of glaucoma, the pains arising from "the blue water."[3] They "cure" that ailment, that is, the "moving" variety, by cauterizing the head generally. It is like the other pitiless "cures" whose purpose the quacks know is to create a new and more painful counter-agent by which the patient forgets, or pretends to forget, his original ailment for some days, on account of his preoccupation with the intensity of his new pain. But that only lasts some days until the pain of the original ailment, whose cause was not rectified, becomes overpowering now that it is away from the influence of the quacks.

752

I knew of a man in the village of Maḥalla Diyāya in the Province of Gharbīya, who repelled the intensity of the pain of this ailment by means of cauterizing the temple. This is an

[1] [A village in the Delta 28¼ miles east of Alexandria. Tr.]
[2] [See note, p. 54.]
[3] [The colloquial name in Egypt for glaucoma. Tr.]

4:Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 MR13 Fellahin MR13
(ca. 1890)



752 old "method" which is only of advantage to its practitioner, who lives comfortably in the shadow of its effect on the minds of simpletons.

## X

## THE "CURE" FOR ULCERS

● 164 THE "old wife" prescribes for the patients who are suffering from chronic ulcers (*nawāṣīr*) having fetid purulent secretions, the following "prescription": Mix one part of snuff (or 759 tobacco dust) with one part of natron (its usual name [p. 22] is *atrūn*, and it is sesquicarbonate of soda). Pour on them two parts of very pure olive-oil and boil the whole for a while. Then anoint the tube of the ulcer (*nāṣūr*) and it will be cured.

Some excellent people have attested to me that it is a "cure" that has been proved by actual observation to be advantageous. It may be that time will show the truth of this experiment and beneficial remedy. But it is well known to-day that there is no cure for ulcers except scraping them with special instruments, or erasing the ulcerous tube, thus removing the cause, and sewing up the new wound. Sometimes cautery with a heated probe, or an electric cauterizer is employed.

*Explanation of the "prescription."* The snuff is a cauterizer, and on its entering the wounds it awakens their vitality, which has been weakened by the passage of time, and it changes the nature of the vile secretions for the better. Then fleshy pieces grow up filling the cavity of the ulcerous tube. (But that only results on the supposition that an ulcer is found continuing after the removal of its cause, such as ulcers resulting from a bullet which has entered a muscle deeply, and remains for some time with the surrounding part suppurating. Then it is extracted and the road leading to its original lodging-place has the appearance of [p. 23] an ulcerous tube. But appearances are not evidence).

4: Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 MR13 Fellahin MR13
(ca. 1890)

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## XI

## THE "CURE" FOR ITCH AND DRY SCAB

AMONG the severest of the diseases that afflict mankind is skin-disease (or eczema) with its different varieties, either moist or dry. The "cure" for the dry variety among the "old wives" is to clothe the afflicted one in a garment of pure silk.

A very trustworthy person has related that he had not omitted to use everything prescribed by modern medicine, but without success. So he employed the silk garment and his ailment passed completely away. Indeed the prescription of the "old wife" agrees with what is set down in Canon Law regarding prohibiting men from wearing pure silk except in the case of itch.[1]

## XII

## THE "CURE" FOR PROTUBERANT TUMOURS

THE "old wives" do not stick at any of the diseases unless it is outside the sphere of trickery to affect its "cure." They do not trouble whether by the process of imagination, either through the power of the Jinn, or the development of thought, a "cure" will result. So beware of a very valuable "cure" for tumours which appear on the skin.

The patient seeks out a hen, free from blemish, without a single white feather, and watches her until she lays an egg in a place unreached [p. 25] by the rays of the sun. Then he brings lentils to her with their seeds to all appearance the same in number as the tumours on his body. After he has emptied

[1] [For the references to the prohibition of silken garments, see A. J. Wensinck: *A Handbook of Early Muhammadan Tradition*, Leiden, 1927, p. 45 f. Tr.]

4:Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 MR13 Fellahin MR13
(ca. 1890)



out the contents of the egg in the dark place, he takes a lentil grain and places it on a tumour and recites over it this charm: Oh, lentil become a tumour! Oh, tumour become a lentil!

He then places the lentil inside the egg, and so on until the number of lentils equals the number of tumours. Then he runs in haste to an eastern wall on which the rays of the sun are striking and buries them in it, and the tumours fall away in consequence, in a few days, not exceeding a week. And this is truly beneficial according to the story.

*The true explanation.* We return, as we already said in Part I (p. 27) to the question of demons (*'afārīt*). Often they (i.e. the "old wives") assert that the hen (particularly a black one, since that is mentioned in the "prescription") has an obedient servant for herself, her eggs and their possessor, and by the secret of his influence upon diseases, or by his powerful relationship with the demon of diseases, the tumours will fall away. They believe that every disease has a demon, as is the current creed among the village witches, according to another opinion.

Often the shrinkage of the vessels feeding these tumours is brought about by a certain degree of imaginative influence. [p. 26.] Then (the tumours) wither gradually, and this is as far as medical explanation of their falling off is possible, if what the narrators say is correct.

## XIII

## CATARACT AND AMMONIA

EGYPT is indeed a happy hunting ground for every trader and quack. How simple our Egyptian *fellāḥ* is! He loses his life and cheapens his body for the experiments of those who trade in spirits. But the *fellāḥ* of Egypt is not to be blamed, for he has no instructor.

There came to me one day a patient complaining of his eyes. On examination I saw the left eye-ball protruding from the

4: Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 (ca. 1890) MR13 Fellahin MR13 Egypt MR1



F 164 F 757

bone and the eye-lids were swollen and distended, and the eye-ball wound was violently inflamed, veiling the cornea. When I asked him the reasons for the ailment he hesitated somewhat in answering, so I repeated the question and he answered as follows: "There was a cataract in my eye so I went to such and such a doctor." (He mentioned a Greek who used to live in a small tavern in the neighbourhood of the new vegetable market, who claimed a knowledge of medicine for the eyes. The date was Ramaḍān, 1311 = 1893). "He placed ammonia in my eye, and said that after three times it would eat away the granular lids (*laḥmīya*) from the eye, and lo, I am as you see!"

So I subjected him to the treatment counteracting inflammation by means of suitable drops until these ailments were removed. And I declare that if that man had delayed and had not hastened of his own accord to a qualified doctor, his eye would have become a prey to the voracity of the ammonia.

## XIV

## MĀNASTIR[1] AND WOMEN

E F 278 757

I WAS one day sitting in the shop of one of the druggists in the *wikāla* of *Abū Zaid* in Cairo, when there came to him an old woman, and asked him if he had any *mansir* (sic). So I interrupted by asking her what benefit it had. (This was after I knew that she meant *mānastir*). She said: My son, this is of benefit to women whose bodies are weak because of sleeplessness and disease or irritation. When "the bead of the cow" [see page 76] and *ḳirtās* and *mufattaḳa* [see page 77] are of no avail there is brought to her *mansir* to the weight of an oke.[2] (She means that the weight of the *mānistir* creates in the woman who takes it, fat to the amount of an oke.)

[1] [See above, p. 96.]

[2] [*Ūḳḳa* or *uḳḳa*, the Turkish pound in general use in Egypt, and usually termed *oke* by Europeans. It is equivalent to 2¾ lb. Tr.]

E [804]

4:Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 (ca. 1890) MR13 Fellahin MR13 EGYPT MR1

E F 298 N57

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After the man had answered her request and she had gone away, I thought about that "remedy," but I did not find it in any way resembling *mānastir*, except that both of them are from inside the testicle (*hiṣya*) of an animal. I was astonished at that. The druggist said to me that in the past this article was asked in connection with this and similar "prescriptions," e.g. as a tonic for coition, and for use in pregnancy, etc. He had men in India searching for it. But to-day the new medicine has nullified these things, and traces remain [p. 29] only on the tongues of "old wives." The laboratory of G——— and F——— and D———[1] has made it easy for us to find this article, however, at a low price since it is imported from Europe. These are the results of the progress of industry. How marvellous it is of Science to abolish it at first in its capacity as a natural product, and then find it (or something counterfeiting it) by way of industry!

E F [834] [843]

*The true explanation.* It is not possible to ascribe *mānastir* to the testicles of an animal unless we consider as true the theory of the Elixir of Judenau (cf. Part I, p. 88 ff) or the bringing back of youth, after old age has come, by means of the testicles of the Indian pig.

I have witnessed the injection of this quintessence during the days when I was in the Ḳaṣr al-'Ainī Hospital. Our Professor, Doctor Ḥasan Pāshā Maḥmūd administered it to an old man called Mūsā, the Shaikh of the village of Ṭurāna in the Province of Buḥaira, who was afflicted with the nervous trembling of old age. But he did not change anything of the state of the patient.

## XV

## CORNS

F 164 N57

CORNS [lit. "Eyes of fish"] named "nails" (*misāmīr*) are one of the ailments [p. 30] of civilisation, or the excess of women

[1] [Here he mentions the names of certain well-known Cairo druggists in the European quarter. Tr.]

4: Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 (ca. 1890) MR13 Fellahin MR13 EGYPT MR1



F 164 151

imitating each other. Because corns result from the pressure of tight shoes upon the toes. They "cure" it by placing a piece of tomato upon it, and leaving it for three hours. Then it ceases.

## XVI

## IN THE VICINITY OF THE BĀB ZUWAILA[1]

F 159

In front of the Bāb Zuwaila, named the Bāb al-Mutawallī, there is a man who sells *kunāfa*[2] too renowned to be forgotten by the consumers of this article. My Professor, Muḥammad Bey Durrī told me about him that he "cures" all kinds of eczema (*ḳūba*) and especially what particularizes the varieties of *karfa* (see p. 68). He had, he told me, a little maid-servant afflicted with this ailment. He directed her to the proper treatment, but an "old wife" took her off with her to that man without his knowledge. The result was good, for she was "cured."

F 157 155

*The true explanation.* This man employs certain ointments doubly compounded, and since their success is assured he does not abandon the means by enquiring too closely concerning it. We are aware that crowds in the provinces are renowned for this and are called *Ḥāwīyīn* (or snake-charmers) since they recite certain words over a glass containing olive-oil and the yolk of an egg and spit into it. And here is the importance of the slimy mixture composed [p. 32] of the two substances above-mentioned, since by it the effect of outside influences is prevented.

F [158]

Near to that in effect is the juice exuding from the sycamore (which is called "the milk of the sycamore," *leben al-gummaiz*). It is famous among the *fellāḥīn* for the "cure" of different kinds of skin-diseases.

[1] [One of the famous old city-gates of Cairo, also called the *Bāb al-Mutawalli* because a very holy Shaikh of that name is supposed to appear there sometimes. Numerous relics of hair, rags and teeth are suspended from its nails by the superstitious folk who hope for a "cure" or a blessing thereby. Tr.]

E [155]

[2] [i.e. sweet vermicelli. Tr.]

4:Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 MR13 Fellahin MR13
(ca. 1890)

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## XVII

## "WINKING" (ṬARFA)

164 SLIGHT shocks falling upon the eye-ball cause irritation which often leads to a dangerous state on most occasions. All such afflictions arising from an external influence are named 757 by the common people *Ṭarfa*. They have sundry "cures" for it. One of these is effective for the time being. It consists of closing the eyelid and placing the hand outspread above it. Then another person puts his mouth to this hand and blows [818] upon it with his foul breath, deep breaths one after the other. Shortly after we see them ordering the milk of a woman to be brought and a drop placed in the eye. Then it is "cured."

*The true explanation.* As for the blowing upon the eye, it is of little account, since it has no real influence upon it. But milk has been used since ancient times for placing [p. 33] in the eye for all light irritations which occur therein. It is very good. Many *koḥl* manufacturers still order it even to-day.

*The true treatment.* The handiest and simplest thing for the patient is to boil a little Greek camomile [*bābūnig Rūmī*] (or "the chickens of 'Ali's mother") and throw into that hot mixture a piece of tissue, which he places at once upon his eye for the space of a quarter of an hour for two hours. Remove all customary eye-salves. There is no harm in using human or animal milk, since it mollifies the inflamed condition. But if the eye is in a serious state, then the first thing is to hasten to an oculist.

# FOLK MEDICINE IN MODERN EGYPT

## XVIII

## A "CURE" FOR ITCH (GARAB)

ITCH is common among children in the elementary schools in the villages on account of the meeting there of the many conditions which help its development, such as dirtiness, moisture and carelessness. They "cure" it in the beginning by breakfasting every morning on a piece of "camel-driver's sulphur"—(Thus it is known among them. It is natural sulphide)—inside the yolk of an egg. If that is not successful there is the final "cure." The poor child is taken to the sewer of the village mosque [p. 34] and his body besmeared with those putrid substances, which they leave upon him for two complete days. Some of the Shaikhs of the villages exceed the bounds in the efficacy of this "cure." I have seen companies of them leading their boys to the sewer of Sīdī Ibrāhīm al-Dasūḳī at the time of the *Maulid* [or Birthday Festival] to perform with them there. This method is harmful and a hindrance to a real cure.

*The true explanation.* Nobody denies that compounds of sulphur are beneficial in the curing of all diseases that are named parasitic. But in spite of that there is no escape from observing cleanliness. Treatment by "camel-driver's sulphur" is good—(the sewer method, of course, is a quite different matter)—because the sedimentary substances contained in sulphurous substances touch the affected skin as agents and act strongly. So would that people smeared the body of the child with sulphur instead of with those filthy substances!

## XIX

## THE "CURE" FOR BALDNESS

THOSE exposed to being smitten by it in the villages are also the children of the elementary schools, because, like the

4:Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 (ca. 1890) MR13 Fellahin MR13



preceding, it is an infectious parasitic disease, and found in very hideous forms. Through neglect of it, and failure to attend to it at the beginning, it baffles physicians and becomes a danger.

The thoughts of the "old wives" are perplexed regarding its "cure." Some of them order anointing with petrol; others order tar and other substances. All are profitless. The famous method is "the cap of pitch" [*ṭaḳīyat-al-zift*] in other words, making the pitch (which is the resin of certain coniferæ) flow upon the head of the patient hot, in the form of a skull-cap[1] and leaving it for weeks, nay months. Then the quack comes one day to pull off the cap—a day of distress for the patient!—since his hair, nay his skin also, sticks to the pitch. So he suffers tortures, and blood flows after the terrible uproar of pulling off the cap. Very often the patient faints on account of the intensity [p. 36] of the pain and the great loss of blood. Then after that there is brought half an oke[2] of common salt crystals and the head of the patient is rubbed with them violently.

Do not ask about the pains of this savage method. After a month has passed the "operation" is repeated. There is no need to witness it to know that the second "operation" is more grievous than the first because the healing of the wound is not complete and the new skin is pulled off a second time, and the pains are doubled. In view of all this, say whether this method is advantageous with its violence and danger! Even if this method were successful sometimes, the success would be due solely to the exclusion of the air by means of the cap prescribed against the parasite, because it ranks as a parasite called aerobic, that is "air-loving."

[1] [*Ḳalansuwa*, or *ḳulansiya*, the name of a tight-fitting cap often worn under a turban. Tr.]

[2] [See above, p. 111.]

4: Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 (ca. 1890) MR13 Fellahin MR13 Egypt MR1

# FOLK MEDICINE IN MODERN EGYPT

## XX

## SHAHḲA

F 164

THE "old wives" of the provinces generally use the name *shahḳa* for the malady of small-pox, which attacks infants and appears in the form of vesicles full of a liquid which is at first pure, then it becomes turbid and bursts. The "old wives" of the provinces and the mothers of the infants assert that the occurrence of these vesicles is caused by a woman or a man glancing at the child with a look of admiration for its beauty, and delight in its loveliness. Then the child falls after that into the state of that illness. Hence it is called *shahḳa* (injury by the evil eye) or *naẓra* (evil glance). They "cure" it, as is well known, by the child's mother stealing from her neighbour a piece of her dough with which she smears those vesicles.

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*The true explanation.* There is no advantage known in smearing these vesicles with dough. As a matter of fact this method is one belonging to the village pick-pockets and provincial thieves. The history of absurdities preserves it, and transmitters hand it down. [p. 38.] In the beginning of the whole business it was a means of accomplishing the theft of a neighbour's property under the excuse of a "prescription order." For what woman would not give her neighbour a piece of dough to cure her poor child!

## XXI

## A "HARMLESS" PRESCRIPTION

E 757 218

ONE of the "old wives" prescribed for one of the leading men of Cairo, who complained of a wound in his leg, the following "prescription": Powdered leg of dove [calumba] and greasy wax, the former being thrown into the latter after boiling. After cooling a little, the soft paste is taken and

4:Walker E-4 (no date) 1934 MR13 Fellahin MR13
(ca. 1890) EGYPT MR



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applied to the wound. It resembles soft collodium[1] except that the latter is beneficial because of its transparency, which makes it allowable to witness the progress of the wound beneath it without the need of lifting it and causing the fleshy surfaces to bleed.

## XXII

F

## THE "REMOVED" HEART

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We see the "old wives" diagnosing anæmia as "the removal of the heart and its being changed from its place as a result of an accident." They "cure" it as follows: The patient sits as in

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the case of *Takrīfa* (see Part I, p. 19) [p. 39] and the "old wife" sits down in front of him and places her fore-finger under the xiphoid cartilage, which they imagine is "the feather of the heart" (ريشة القلب) or its gristle. Then after moving it a little the "old wife" cries out, as if she had stumbled upon a buried person, saying: Oh, my child! Your heart is removed and the "feather" (*rīša*) is falling considerably!

*The true explanation.* They assert that the xiphoid cartilage is bound to the heart by strong ties so that when the heart changes it pulls it in because it is like a tent-peg holding it firm. They "cure" the patients by one of two methods:

(1) The first is an endeavour to raise the above-mentioned "feather" to the top, i.e. returning it to its original position. It is necessary to resume this "operation" for seven days, the action lasting each day about ten minutes.

(2) The second is famous for its success. The patient is ordered to go to the door of a house opening on the west, and to hang by his right hand from that door in such a way that the side mentioned carries the rest of his body. He must have filled his mouth with water, and must remain thus without breathing for a space of time varying according to the ability of the patient. When he feels he is without power to retain his

[1] [Pyro-xylin, gun-cotton. Tr.]

respiration he spits out the water from his mouth forcibly and comes down without mishap. In most cases, however, giddiness overcomes the person, and he falls in a faint and does not get up for some time. [p. 40.]

*The true treatment.* Since this ailment is nought but bloodlessness, which prolongs many a long illness, its cure is comprised in taking healthy precautions such as (after the removal of the cause) the taking of iron compounds.

## XXIII

## THE "SEVERED" HEART

WHEN any sick person complains of weakness in his strength and withering in his body after severe fevers or very depressing illnesses the "old wives" of the village diagnose his illness as "the severing of the heart." (قطاع القلب).

*The true explanation.* To this they attribute causes which are weaker than a spider's web, such as that the patient had in the time of his health carried something heavy for example, and they assert that the cords of the heart have been cut by this means. I know that Farag Abū Maḥmūd of the village of Munāshela in the Province of Buḥaira (he is the eczema doctor, see Part I, p. 77) cauterizes those afflicted by this ailment, burning deeply all along the vertebral canal. Often he increases his kindness and beneficence towards the patient by burning him in the navel two or three times.

## XXIV

## THE "SPLITTING" OF THE EYE

EVERY day we see hundreds of *fellāḥīn* complaining of intermittent ophthalmia, especially at the beginning of the summer

164 season. The "old wives" "prescribe" for them the white of eggs mixed with spirit of tutty, or *tūtiyā khalīlī* (oxide of zinc and cadmium and their sulphates). As a result the eye will be "cured" with marvellous rapidity.

*The true explanation.* The "old wives" pretend that this tutty has a hidden power in attracting the redness of the eye and sucking it up completely. The truth of the matter is that the majority of the eyes which they diagnose as "split" are affected with chronic granular ophthalmia. They are affected by sharp twinges caused by congestion. [p. 42.] Indeed the spirit of tutty does influence temporarily, and that is on account of its arresting the inflamed vessels whereby the eye becomes clear. But it lasts only for a little, until the malady returns with greater force.

*The true treatment.* There are special remedies for it, and certain operations. Let the patient, however, in these circumstances consult eye-specialists on account of the danger of this serious malady.

## XXV

## ḤASAN AGHĀ IN DAMANHŪR

759 ḤASAN AGHĀ, above-mentioned, is famous for the "cure" of stone, and extracting it from the urinary bladder. His reputation is widespread, and patients resort to him from all quarters. (And not only those suffering from stone but from any illness in the bladder of uncertain symptoms.) He has an agency in Damanhūr which he has made like a hospital for his 752 numerous patients. His method is to begin by bringing a large plate full of hot water, in which he seats the patient for a little. Then he inserts two fingers of his left hand inside the man's rectum and slips between them a knife with which he wounds the patient's vitals. The blood flows in torrents. Sometimes the patient faints when he sees the blood; sometimes he screams asking for relief. Then our clever quack

8:Schaefer A-5 (1900-1901) 1904
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## 18.

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One of the songs with which the mothers quiet the little ones, and in which one often seeks in vain for the connection. This song, with a few variations, was heard by Goldziher in Cairo in 1873. (Zeitschrift der Deutschen morgenlaendischen Gesellschaft 33, p. 612.)

*Ya naṭara, ṣubbīha,*
*ḥalli-l-wizz yeʿūm fīha.*
*Bint uḫti ʾarʿa ʾarʿa,*
*ḥadha-d-dīb u-rāḥ yirʿa,*
*ʾarʾašha taḥt et-tirʿa.*

O Rain, pour it out!
Let the geese go swimming in it!
My little niece is scab-headed, scab-headed, [164]
The wolf has caught her and gone to eating,
He has gnawed her to pieces in the canal.

1. Compare No. 17, l. 2.

2. Let it rain hard enough to form puddles, in which geese can swim.

3. Owing to the filth in which the country children grow up, scabby heads are not rare. [515]